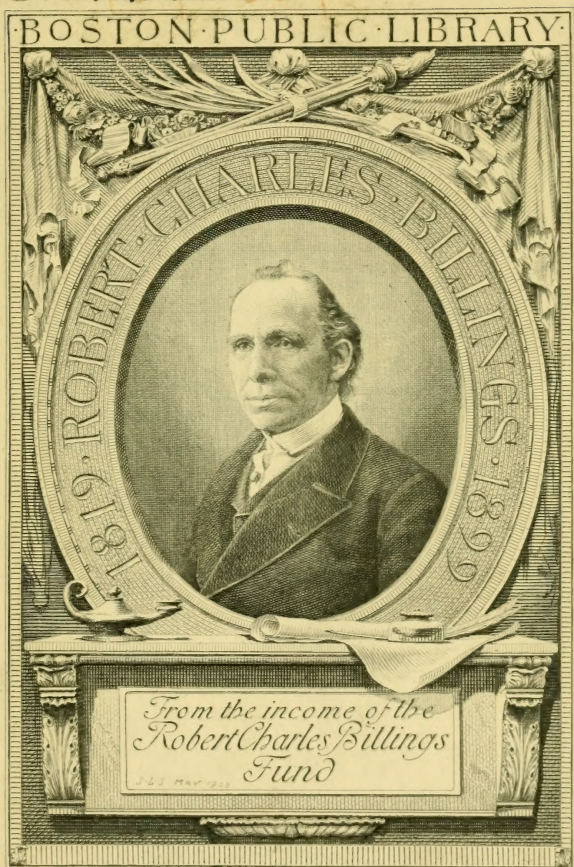


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I WILL MAINTAIN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE VIPER OF MILAN

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

GOD AND THE KING

THE QUEST OF GLORY

A KNIGHT OF SPAIN

THE GOVERNOR OF ENGLAND

I WILL MAINTAIN

BY

MARJORIE BOWEN *[pseud.]*

AUTHOR OF "THE VIPER OF MILAN"

"MOI JE SERA NASSAU, JE MAINTIENDRAI"

MOTTO OF THE HOUSE OF ORANGE

NINTH EDITION

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PART I

JOHN DE WITT, REPUBLICAN

“A man of unwearied industry, inflexible constancy, sound, clear, and deep understanding and untainted integrity; so that whenever he was blinded, it was by the passion that he had for that which he esteemed the good and interest of the State.”—SIR WILLIAM TEMPLE, *Observations on the United Provinces*, 1672.

CHAPTER I

THE IDEALS OF M. DE WITT

"THERE is one subject that we seldom touch upon," said Sir William. "And that is one upon which I am curious to hear you speak."

John de Witt looked up quickly.

"Ah, sir," he smiled faintly. "You are of a probing disposition—what is this subject?"

"The Prince."

"The Prince—" repeated M. de Witt, and an intent expression that might have been trouble came into his full brown eyes. "What is there to say of His Highness?" he added.

The English Ambassador laughed in the soft and pleasant way he had; he was standing by the long window, and, as he answered, glanced out at the wych elms and pale sunshine that filled the garden of M. de Witt.

"The situation is piquant—between good friends you must allow it——"

The Grand Pensionary rose.

"Between good friends, Sir William, the situation is dangerous. I am aware of it—but the Prince—the Prince is only a child."

Sir William moved from the window with a little shiver.

"Your Dutch weather!" he said. "I think the damp has got into my very bones——"

"But you like the house?" asked de Witt. "It hath a large garden for the children when they stay with me—and since it was not possible to remain where I was, I thought I could do no better."

Sir William answered gently, aware of the allusion, veiled under commonplace words, to the late death of Wendela de Witt. It seemed to him, composed and close observer as he was, even of his friends, that the Grand Pensionary had changed more than a little since he had lost his wife.

"It is a noble mansion," he said. "I could be selfish enough to wish this library at Sheen."

He looked, with the approval of a fine taste, round the lofty apartment panelled in mellow-hued, carved wood, and lined with shelves filled with rare and costly volumes; a few handsome portraits hung above the bookcases, and over the high chimney-piece a rich but sombre picture of fruit and flowers showed; on the blue-tiled hearth were brass andirons, and on the table in the centre of the chamber candlesticks were set, also brass, but polished so that they shone like gold.

At a small desk by the far window sat a secretary in a dark dress, writing.

"The house hath been a palace," continued Sir William.

"Therefore should not be the residence of a republican?" smiled John de Witt. "Nay," he added simply, "the house is well enough, but I took it for the garden; and now you look on my one luxury—my books—for the rest the furnishings are simple—too simple for Cornelia's taste, as she will tell you if you stay to dinner,—nay, I doubt not she tells my lady now."

Sir William crossed to one of the bookcases, took a volume down and opened it at random. As John de Witt came up behind him, he spoke in a low tone, looking at the book.

"Who is the new secretary?"

The Grand Pensionary seemed slightly surprised.

"He?—a young man from Guelders." He glanced to where the person in question sat absorbed in writing. "He was recommended to me by de Groot—he is diligent and silent—I like him."

Sir William's white fingers slowly turned the leaves of the volume he held.

"Then we may talk freely?"

"As always in my house."

The Englishman glanced up. His face, which was of a dark, soft, luxurious style of indolent good looks, expressed a watchful yet friendly kind of amusement and interest; his air was slightly cynical, wholly pleasant, as if viewing follies that never tempted him to participate in them he yet found them harmless and tolerated them, good-humouredly.

"Well, then, of the Prince," he said. "What are you going to do?"

John de Witt frowned.

"You think I am afraid of His Highness."

Sir William answered with the ready courtesy that took all appearance of sincerity from his speech—

"All Europe knows that you are afraid of nothing—yet, for Holland's sake, you might tremble a little now."

The cloud did not lift from the Grand Pensionary's noble face. He put out his hand and rested it on the edge of one of the bookshelves, and his delicate fingers tapped restlessly on the polished wood.

"Diplomacy as well as friendship dictates frankness to me," he answered in his slow, stately, yet gentle way,—“nor is there much I could conceal from such an observer as yourself, Sir William. The Orange party have wearied me, have thwarted me, have alarmed me; I find them unreasonable, powerful and dangerous—I speak of the party, not of the Prince.”

"Why not of him?"

"I have no right. He has ever shown himself quiet, tractable, obedient," was the quick reply. "We have never had to complain of his behaviour."

"Yet he is the focus for much discontent," smiled the Englishman, "the magnet for much ambition."

The Grand Pensionary smiled also, uplifting his melancholy eyes.

"His Highness is but seventeen, immersed in study, brought up as a republican—I think he is even ignorant of these agitations in his name. He could not live more quietly."

But it did not escape Sir William that the Grand Pensionary spoke like a man trying to reassure himself.

"The Prince is your pupil—forgive me, but, as I said, the situation is curious. You, sir, a republican—for seventeen years the head of a Republic which has been a fine nation, and a wealthy, and a lesson to all of us—you undertake the education of a Prince who is the heir of the House on whose ruin you founded your Republic; you bring this young man up in your ideas, you teach him this, that, as you will; you are not his master but his friend—he is to regard himself as a mere citizen of the country that is his heritage—well, it is a curious experiment, Mynheer de Witt."

The Grand Pensionary answered quietly—

"I have done all I can—since we speak privately, not as politicians, I will say that I have no hope to always exclude His Highness from all power. I think that when he comes of age he will obtain the command of the army; nor do I regret it—the House of Orange has rendered such service to Holland that there should be some gratitude, some trust shown this Prince."

Sir William closed the book he held and replaced it on the shelf.

"Meanwhile I train him to serve his country," continued de Witt, with a faint smile.

"You serve your country well, Mynheer," remarked the Englishman, watching him.

"I serve my ideals," said the Grand Pensionary.

The Englishman very slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"In these days!—you have been successful, but I should watch this little Prince——"

"We stand firm—The Triple Alliance, the treaty of Breda—the Perpetual Edict," quoted de Witt.

The diplomat who had framed the first had never approved of the last.

"There you went too far," he said.

"There I secured the liberty of Holland," answered the Grand Pensionary, still with that faint smile on his full, finely

cut mouth, "and made impossible a recurrence of 1650—this Prince's father brought his troops to the gates of Amsterdam, no man shall do that again; by abolishing the office of Stadtholder I do away with the fear of a king, and so, sir, secure my Republic."

"Amen to that," answered Sir William. "You have the confidence of the idealist. I love you for it, but I cannot be so sanguine—the Prince, if he is heir to nothing else, hath the name, the prestige, and that is a strange spell to work with the people."

He looked, as he spoke, with the interest of the worldly man at a noble simplicity he admires but cannot comprehend. John de Witt was his friend, they had much in common, respected each other's character and talents, but Sir William Temple had never ceased to marvel at John de Witt.

The Grand Pensionary was silent; a deep thoughtfulness came into his face. The Englishman watched him, smiling a little coldly.

"Do you think that I am not loved in the United Provinces?" asked de Witt suddenly.

Sir William fingered the ends of his cravat. The other did not wait for an answer so leisurely composed.

"This young man is popular—it sometimes seems, Sir William, as if he was heir to the heart of the people——"

"He has the name."

"The name!—and, with the people, is not that everything? I think nothing weighs against the name. The Prince does little to make himself beloved, but there are those who clamour for him as if he owned his ancestor's virtues with his ancestor's titles." And again M. de Witt repeated, "the name!"

Then, as if resolute to close the subject, he laid his hand familiarly on Sir William's velvet sleeve.

"Will you not come into the garden?—the gardens, I have two that open into one. But you know too much, my poor trees will be shamed."

They crossed the room and stepped out of the high

window. The young secretary from Guelders leant back in his chair and watched them walking under the elms.

Not a word of their conversation had been lost on him, and now that he could no longer hear what they said he pondered, in his quick yet laborious way, over their previous speech.

He had been in M. de Witt's service a week. It was in the course of his duty to overhear diplomatic talk, to read, and make notes on, political papers, and, though he had always considered himself well informed, he began to find that what was knowledge in Guelders was ignorance at the Hague.

He reviewed, rather sourly, the change in his feelings this week had brought about. He had been so proud of the post, so grateful for de Groot's recommendation, so confident of what his own energy and industry would do for him; and now he did not feel at all confident.

Not that his trust in himself was diminished; but he had already begun to doubt if he had taken his services to the best market or pledged himself to the most profitable of masters.

He bit his quill and fixed his eyes on M. de Witt, who was standing, not far away, on the gravel path talking to his companion.

The secretary marked with a calculating glance the Grand Pensionary's stately figure, clothed sombrely in black, his pale oval face, under jawed, the full but curiously firm and clean-cut mouth shaded by the slight moustache, the large, weary brown eyes, the high brow over which fell the soft dark hair that was just beginning to be touched with grey, and contrasted his melancholy, noble air with the vivacious ease of the splendid Englishman whose rich comeliness was enhanced by his elegant and costly dress.

As he looked, the young man from Guelders wondered. M. de Witt had been Grand Pensionary of the United Provinces for seventeen years; the secretary had long taken him for granted as something always there, immovable as the law he represented, and had no more questioned the authority than he had the power of this first magistrate of the Republic.

Only with difficulty and by forcing his mind back to his childhood could he recall something of the famous *coup d'état* that had made M. de Witt head of the State.

He recollected dimly the excitement that had filled the country when the young Stadtholder, William the Second, had tried to seize Amsterdam and the absolute power of a king. He remembered going with other boys of his own age to break the windows of a house that had sported Orange favours, and being rebuked by the minister, and made to stay longer in the gaunt white church praying for strength to curb his feelings.

He remembered, too, the news of the sudden death of the Prince who had threatened their liberties, and how they had thanked God for it solemnly. After that there had been the Republic, which he had taken unquestioningly. M. de Witt stood for the United Provinces; as for the last Prince of Orange, born after his father's death, the heir of a fallen House, the secretary had never heard much of him. There had been quarrels as to his education between M. de Witt and his uncle the Elector, between his grandmother and his mother the English Princess . . .

The secretary remembered hearing, without interest, of the death of this lady in England, and of how her son, more than ever a State prisoner, was being educated by M. de Witt.

There seemed no reason why he, Florent Van Mander, of the town of Arnheim, a prudent, able young Dutchman, honourably and profitably employed in the service of the Grand Pensionary, should be so laboriously recalling every detail he had ever heard of William of Orange.

But two things had taken hold of a nature naturally observant, cautious, yet energetic and aspiring: the first was the conviction that M. de Witt held a position by no means as secure as it seemed, a position that, despite the treaty of Breda, despite the Triple Alliance, was one that he, the new secretary, must watch carefully if he would not be entangled in a falling cause; and the second was the impression that this youth, the son of the late Stadtholder, was a latent force in Holland that might one day become tremendous, overwhelming.

"He has the name," Sir William Temple had said, and the words had seized Florent Van Mander's slow but not dull imagination. He thought that the Englishman had expressed less than he felt, and longed to hear him again on the subject.

He had only seen Sir William twice, but there was something in his easy, almost careless, manner, in the slightly disdainful shrewdness of his remarks, that inspired the secretary with a respect he did not entertain for John de Witt. He had an uncomfortable feeling that the Grand Pensionary was a man who might be, without much difficulty, fooled.

"I serve my ideals," he had said.

That annoyed Van Mander. He had not a very clear conception of an idealist, but he was tolerably certain that no man could be one and still be successful in a practical way, and it had struck him as a pointless and rather weak thing to say—"I serve my ideals."

He had noted other remarks, too, of the same trend; a certain loftiness of outlook, an unworldly tolerance of detraction and malice, that did not please him. He would have preferred a master more eagerly alive to his own advantage, more conscious of evil in others and prepared to fight it on its own grounds.

Sir William had also said other things that remained in the young secretary's mind. He had spoken of the curious situation, the Republican Minister instructing and watching the Prince—at once tutor and jailer—and Florent Van Mander thought that it was indeed curious, and a little foolish, too, on the part of John de Witt.

And there were yet other aspects of the situation that the previous conversation had not touched on, but which were nevertheless present to the roused mind of the secretary.

This Prince was cousin of the King of France, a figure of dazzling and alarming greatness, and nephew of the King of England; and both these were of an aspect menacing to the Republic, true—there was the Triple Alliance, but——

The young secretary became aware that he had bitten his pen till it was split and useless, and he laid it down with a

vexed look. He greatly disliked to do anything careless or unmethodical, or even to become absorbed in reflections not in themselves necessary to present business.

He took out another quill, mended it, and glanced again out of the window.

The Grand Pensionary and Sir William had been joined by Agneta de Witt—a pale, graceful, fragile-looking child—and Cornelia Van Bicker, the mistress of the house.

Looking at these ladies moving under the shifting, pale shadows of the trees, the young man's rather hard eyes softened. He had the Dutchman's intense respect for domestic affections, and to think of the recent death of Wendela de Witt moved him. He had never seen her, but he knew that she had been good and gentle, patient and adoring, like her daughter Agneta, and he guessed at the great loneliness that her loss had left in the heart of John de Witt. He thought of it whenever he saw her sister, Cornelia Van Bicker, or one of her quiet, sweet-voiced children.

As he watched, the little party turned towards the house, Sir William in his blue-and-gold velvet ruffled with ribbon, his heavy curls falling round his handsome face, walking beside the Grand Pensionary, who had no relief to his black garments save his broad linen collar, and between them the little figure of Agneta in her white gown and prim cap, holding herself soberly, while before them moved the sister of Wendela de Witt, self-contained, plainly dressed, with the fading, changing sunlight flickering over her dark dress.

Florent Van Mander returned to the letter he was copying, for he observed the Grand Pensionary was leaving the others and returning to the library.

When M. de Witt opened the window and entered, he rose, waiting his instructions.

"I have finished these documents, Mynheer," he said, pointing to some papers given him by another secretary. "Van Ouvealler thought they should be copied in case you care to submit them to Their High Mightinesses."

"What are they?" asked John de Witt. He always spoke

gently and courteously; to-night Van Mander found himself noticing it.

"Letters from the Provinces, Mynheer," he answered, "dealing with the riots in the name of the Prince of Orange——"

"Ah, that." The Grand Pensionary frowned thoughtfully. "The burgomasters should be able to deal with it."

"It seems in Zeeland——"

"You have a letter from Zeeland?"

"From Mynheer Van Teel—one Michael Tichelaer is inciting the people to violence in Middelburg."

"Michael Tichelaer," M. de Witt repeated thoughtfully. "Yes, I remember the man—I must write to Mynheer Van Teel." He paused a moment, then added, "I fear we are too lenient."

The secretary sorted and neatly arranged the papers. It was not his place to offer comment, but there were many things that he burned to say.

Meanwhile the Grand Pensionary was regarding him with a kindly if remote interest. The young man had been warmly recommended for zeal and industry, and so far he had found both; he saw too, for himself, resolution and capacity in the blunt, firm features, in the alert grey eyes and erect figure.

"You are satisfied with your position, Mynheer Van Mander?" he asked.

"Quite, Mynheer,"—the secretary precisely tied the ribbons of the portfolio,— "is it not an enviable one?"

"You may make it so," answered John de Witt quietly, yet with a kind of glow in his voice, "—because you are in the way to serve your country, and that is indeed an enviable thing."

Florent Van Mander was silent. His country was not much in his thoughts; he meant to serve success.

"I think there is nothing more to-night," said M. de Witt. "You will be wishing to get home—have you comfortable lodgings?" he added kindly.

"Yes, Mynheer, in the Kerkestraat."

"You must dine with us soon. Will you leave out the letter from Middelburg? I need not remind you to be early in the morning—there is somewhat to do. Good-night, Mynheer."

"Good-night, Mynheer."

M. de Witt smiled in his melancholy, half tender, half distant fashion and left the room.

Florent Van Mander put away the papers, setting aside in an upper drawer the letter from Van Teel, locked the desk and placed the key on his watch-chain.

The sunlight in the garden was taking on a deeper hue and flushing the walls of the library and the well-filled bookcases to a red-gold colour; the leaves of the wych elms shook in a trembling, joyous kind of life and motion in the strong yet gentle breeze that was arising.

The deep, solemn chimes of the Groote Kerk struck six.

It was later than the secretary had supposed; he usually had his dinner at this hour. He took his eyes from the quiet beauty of the garden and hastened to leave the house.

The dining-room door was open as he passed down the hall, and he had a glimpse of the company gathered round the plainly furnished table. John de Witt at the head of it, saying grace with an earnest composure; Cornelia Van Bicker standing with folded hands, the bright English face of Lady Temple above her falling lace collar; and Sir William, tolerant, good-humouredly amused and placid.

The young secretary passed out into the street. The sunshine was pleasant down the Kneuterdyk Avenue, bright in the windows of the houses opposite, and gay in the trees that were just turning a faint tint of yellow. A saltish breeze touched Van Mander's face, it was blowing straight across the flat country, up from the sea at Scheveningen, and brought with it memories of the dunes, the sand, and the foam.

An unnamable, an unreal excitement stole into the blood that usually ran so coolly; just as if the young man had suddenly heard commanding music or seen a flag flung out against the sky. This feeling had been with him slightly ever

since he had entered the service of John de Witt; to-night it culminated.

In the Englishman's words, he thought--

"He has the name."

Florent Van Mander could not forget that remark nor the tone in which it was spoken. It seemed to give the clue to his own restlessness, his curiosity as to the Prince—his discontent with his new master.

The name!

The sense of it, the power, were about him in the keen breeze, in the sunlit trees, in the whole atmosphere of the royal Hague.

As he turned home he repeated it to himself—

"William of Orange . . ."

CHAPTER II

THE INTRIGUERS

FLORENT VAN MANDER, comfortable after his dinner, sitting at his open window smoking, and watching the people pass up and down the Kerkestraat, was surprised, not disagreeably, by the servant entering his solitude to announce a visitor owning a foreign name she stumbled over.

Hyacinthe St. Croix—Van Mander had known him in Arnheim when he himself was a magistrate's clerk there, ambitious, with an eye on the Hague, and the Frenchman a half disavowed agent of the Marquis de Pomponne, some one who had travelled the Provinces several times already, observing, noting, making acquaintances and gathering information where he could.

The young secretary called for candles—he had been sitting in the dark—and closed the window.

On the heels of the maid with the lights came St. Croix, better dressed, more self-confident, more assured in manner than formerly.

The two greeted each other formally.

"I did not know that you were at the Hague," said Van Mander. "How did you find me?"

The Frenchman laid his hat and gloves on one of the high-backed chairs.

"I was passing through Arnheim the other day—I called upon your uncle and he told me. You have a good post."

Florent put a chair for his guest and took one himself the other side of the small dark table; between them stood the two heavy branch candlesticks, glimmering each in the light

of the other candles that illuminated the small, neat room with its deep window-seat, polished wood furniture, plain engravings on the walls and Delft pottery on the chimney-piece.

Florent refilled his pipe and invited the other to smoke. The two long clays soon filled the chamber with slow, fragrant smoke.

"So you are in the service of M. de Witt," remarked St. Croix.

"Yes."

The Frenchman smiled as he pondered on the best means of getting what he wanted from the laconic Dutchman; it was astonishingly difficult, he found, to deal with a nation so blunt and so reserved.

In the silence that followed Florent stared at him stolidly, marking every detail of his appearance, his short red jacket of the newest French fashion showing the laced shirt beneath, the cravat and ruffles of lace, the silk stockings and shoes with ribbon rosettes, the frizzled, fair hair that framed the small-featured, rather insignificant face of Hyacinthe St. Croix.

Van Mander had the national contempt of foreign luxury, but these signs of prosperity annoyed him in a slow kind of way. He knew St. Croix was of the small gentry, no better born than himself, and not so long ago no better dressed; now he contrasted this gay attire with his own serviceable grey and worsted hose, and wished he had been the one to find such profitable employment.

"How do you like M. de Witt?" asked St. Croix suddenly.

"Very well," said Florent.

The Frenchman regarded him out of narrowed eyes, and asked again, with equal abruptness—

"Have you seen the Prince of Orange?"

"No."

"But you have heard, since you have been at the Hague, a great deal of him?"

"I have heard of him," answered Florent.

St. Croix laid down his pipe.

"You have drawn your own conclusions, of course," he said. "You were always shrewd."

Florent was flattered and excited; he managed to show neither feeling.

"I have drawn some conclusions," was all he admitted.

"On the position of the Prince—and of M. de Witt?"

"I have only been at the Hague a week——"

But Hyacinthe St. Croix knew fairly well the man he dealt with.

"Come," he said in an intimate tone that swept aside evasion, "you know as well as I do that this Government must fall."

The words gave the young secretary a shock. He sat silent, sucking his pipe, not wishing to admit that he was startled.

The Frenchman leant back calmly in his chair.

"The whole feeling of the country is against M. de Witt," he continued. "You must have seen it."

It occurred to Florent, in a vague, impersonal sort of way, that the Grand Pensionary's secretary had no right to be listening to these things, or even to be speaking at all to a Frenchman intriguing for his Ambassador; but he told himself that he served success, and success did not seem to lie with M. de Witt.

"Yet we are at peace at home and abroad," he remarked, to probe the other.

St. Croix smiled.

"You think of the Triple Alliance," he said.

"True—only signed this year," returned Florent. "Still there is always France."

"Also do not be too sure of England," said St. Croix. "Despite the Triple Alliance—she stands very well with France—I could tell you something——"

Florent Van Mander looked him straight in the face.

"Do you mean that France and England might combine for the restoration of the Prince of Orange?"

The Frenchman lifted his eyebrows.

"Upon conditions—they might. If there were a war what could M. de Witt do?"

Van Mander thought a moment.

"He beat England in '56—but now——"

"He could do nothing against France—that is obvious."

"Yes, it is obvious," admitted Florent.

"And the prospect is threatening."

"I know——"

"Well, you see the part the Prince will play?"

There was a little pause, then the Dutchman said slowly—

"He is King Louis' cousin and King Charles' nephew——"

"You take me," replied St. Croix, "the Prince is related to their Majesties—and he has no cause to love M. de Witt."

Florent drew a quick breath.

"You think he . . . would work for France?"

"Can there be a doubt of it?" smiled St. Croix.

There was no answer from Florent. He laid down his pipe and sat still, considering.

Rumours, whispers, hints were taking at last tangible form: this young prisoner, pupil of M. de Witt, was to be the instrument to deliver the country into the rapacious hands of France. Well, there was little cause to wonder; indeed he had almost guessed it. The Prince had, as St. Croix said, little cause to love either M. de Witt or his Republic.

He raised his grey eyes and looked into the Frenchman's face—

"These are strange things to say to a Dutchman and a servant of M. de Witt."

St. Croix answered quickly—

"But you serve success."

At these words, that he did not recall having ever uttered to this man, Florent was again silent. It was perfectly true; he was at the beginning of his career and ambitious; he had no desire to follow a falling cause. The Republic was no more to him than the Prince, he told himself; and there was no reason that he should not, out of the crisis that threatened, earn a place and distinction for himself.

St. Croix observed him closely. He was not afraid of having said too much, for he had read his man, some years before, in Guelders.

"It seems I serve the wrong master now," said Florent at last, with a grim set to his mouth. "I must not look out for fortune in the train of M. de Witt."

The Frenchman answered slowly and with meaning—

"There is fortune, and great fortune, to be found in the service of M. de Witt, by men like you who know how to look for it . . ."

Once more Florent was silent. He kept his eyes fixed on the dark surface of the table, where the reflected lights of the candles glimmered. He thought that he understood.

"The Prince," continued St. Croix, "and the power behind the Prince, can be very well served by one in the pay of M. de Witt."

Florent was now sure that he understood. Not by being loyal to his master, but by betraying him was he to satisfy his ambitions. The way of success lay not with the Grand Pensionary—but with the Prince, who was another name for France.

For the moment his instinct was to resent this calm suggestion that he was the willing instrument of foreign intrigue, but quick reflection showed him the folly of it. St. Croix knew him; some time past, in Guelders, he had taken money for such information of Dutch politics as he could command. His hesitation took another form.

"How am I to know that this Prince of yours is worth serving—at a risk?" he said.

"You know that France is worth serving."

"Buat died," remarked Florent dryly, "for tampering with France."

"Buat was a fool," returned St. Croix; "and we do not want any knight-errantry from you—one of M. de Witt's secretaries cannot fail to be useful—you will see how."

"Yes, I see how," answered Florent; "but at present

M. de Witt represents the Government and the law, and the Prince is a powerless cipher——"

"Not so powerless; we are in touch with him, he commands a section of the nobles—and he has the name."

Florent, hearing again the words used by Sir William Temple, started inwardly. It was curious that the name that owed its prestige and its weight to the fact that it was the name of the man who had first given Holland her liberty was to be used now to aid in her downfall.

"He is a boy," said Van Mander quickly. "He has been brought up by M. de Witt—educated as a republican——"

St. Croix smiled.

"Is M. de Witt clever enough to train a prince into a commoner? I do not think so."

Interest shone in Florent's grey eyes.

"How far has the Prince gone—with France?"

"He is of an extraordinary caution—he will not commit himself while he is in the power of M. de Witt, but take it from me that he does not love him. . . . Has he cause to?—after the Act of Exclusion? . . . His only hope lies in England and France, and he knows it."

"You confirm what I have ever heard," answered Florent. "The Prince is only a figure-head,—a cloak to cover the designs of France."

St. Croix nodded.

"Put it so if you will. And now," he instinctively lowered his voice, "I come to the main object of my visit."

A little colour flushed Florent's face. He had wondered from the first what particular meaning there could be in St. Croix seeking him out. His position was one of power certainly, if put to a traitorous use, but De Pomponne must have many agents and spies. He waited.

"You will understand," continued St. Croix, leaning forward across the table, "that the Prince is kept very close. His governor, his tutors, his gentlemen, are all M. de Witt's men and practically his jailers. He cannot go abroad unattended nor receive any one alone; his letters are read—his movements,

his speech, watched. It is almost impossible for us to convey to him any message—M. le Marquis de Pomponne's audiences are formal, and always under the eye of some creature of M. de Witt,—here you can help us."

Florent still waited. He would not, on the first asking, have betrayed M. de Witt wholesale, but he was not averse to some service to the other side.

The Frenchman smoothed down the ruffles at his wrist, keeping his eyes on his listener.

"M. de Witt visits the Prince almost every day—Tuesday afternoons he devotes to instructing him in politics, afterwards going to the assembly in the Binnenhof. It is his practice to take one of his secretaries with him—it would be possible for this man to convey a packet to the Prince."

Florent answered quietly, but his eyes shone—

"You want me to try?"

"Yes."

"A servant of the Prince whom we have used," St. Croix went on, "as a go-between has lately been suspected, and dismissed by M. de Witt; we are hard put to it for a means to communicate with the Prince."

Florent straightened himself in the stiff chair. To-morrow was Tuesday.

"Van Oudenaller accompanied M. de Witt last week," he said. "I think it very likely that M. de Witt will request me to do so this—but I shall be left in the ante-chamber . . ."

St. Croix shrugged his shoulders.

"As to that—you must find your chance—better wait than risk detection. . . . I leave it to your discretion."

"I am not imprudent," smiled Florent. "Give me the packet—if I go I will attempt it; if not I can, as you say, wait . . ."

The Frenchman took a thick, folded letter from the inner lining of his red coat and laid it on the table between them.

"If that reach His Highness safely it will be a service M. de Pomponne will not forget," he said impressively.

"I will do my best," answered Florent, "but I still value

my place; while M. de Witt is Grand Pensionary I think it worth while to be in his good graces."

Hyacinthe St. Croix rose.

"France has her heel on Europe," he said. "With the help of this little Prince she will have the United Provinces—" he began to pull on his fringed gloves—"I give this Government two—three years—no more."

"There is England," remarked Florent, still thinking of the Triple Alliance.

"England—like Sweden—may take her price," returned St. Croix.

Florent rose too.

"The politics of this land are shaken up and down like sand tossed in the palm," he said, as if he had suddenly roused himself. "I am in the employ of the Government, but in no way bound to any master—tell M. le Marquis de Pomponne so—as M. de Witt's secretary I know something . . ."

"How much?" asked St. Croix, lacing his gloves.

Florent answered steadily—

"I know that M. de Witt is afraid."

"Of France—of England?"

"Of William of Orange."

"He hath good cause," answered St. Croix. He picked up his hat with the fine buckle, his satin-lined cloak. "I think if His Highness once gave the signal the whole country would be in arms. There is a strange revulsion of feeling against this ideal republic, is there not?"

Florent was taciturn again. He raised one of the brass candlesticks.

"The stairs are very dark," he said, and opened the door. He made no show of friendliness or hospitality, no attempt to draw the Frenchman. He wanted to be alone. "When shall I see you again?" he asked.

St. Croix hitched up his sword-belt.

"Better not meet here again, nor at the house of M. le Marquis where I stay. . . . There is a small tavern kept by a Frenchman near the Nieuwe Kerk—the Nieuwe Doelen

he calls it—we may meet there—say Wednesday evening—six of the clock.”

Florent came out on to the landing with his visitor and held the candle so that a flickering radiance was cast down the sombre stairway.

“I will come if I can,” he answered slowly.

“*Au revoir*,” said St. Croix, and added some laughing commonplace for the benefit of any maid-servant who might be in hearing.

Florent waited with the light until the gay feather and mantle had disappeared round the bend of the stairs, then he returned to his room and took up the letter left by St. Croix. It was sealed in three places with the Marquis de Pomponne’s signet, and addressed formally to: “His Highness William Henry, Prince of Orange Nassau,” etc., as if the scribe had enjoyed writing out the fine titles.

Fine titles indeed to belong to an insignificant tool of France—but Florent at once checked that foolish reflection. The Prince was behaving prudently, much in his way as he, Florent Van Mander, was, in following success and securing his own ambitions. He was doing, in fact, the one thing there was for him to do—a bargain with France or England was his one means of escape.

Florent turned the letter over. He was curious to know exactly what it contained; he wished that he had asked St. Croix.

He was curious, also, to see the Prince, to judge him for himself. He thrilled with unreasonable excitement at the thought of meeting him.

A distant, threatening noise coming from the street below made him quickly put the letter into his pocket and go to the window.

He was not in much doubt of what it was—another of those noisy, useless Orange riots, dispersed by the train-bands and always ignored by M. de Witt; a handful of discontented people headed by boyish enthusiasts like the young student Jacob Van der Graef. Florent was not greatly interested in them.

He leant out of the window.

Everything had faded into the heavy grey of a cloudy night ; the straight lines of the houses opposite the great tower of the Groote Kerk, the poplar tree that rustled so persistently ; a new moon, clear out, hard, shone through the hurrying vapours.

By the street-lamps' feeble glow Florent could see some people running up the street towards the scene of the riot ; they carried sticks and swords, and some wore Orange favours.

He smiled cynically to himself, reflecting how little they knew that the Prince whom they shouted for as an embodiment of all patriotic virtue was in reality sacrificing them to their greatest enemy, bargaining away their liberty for his personal advancement.

They are mostly fools, he thought, and shivered back from the sea wind, closing the window.

For a long while he sat silent in his comfortable room, smoking, and staring at his own shadow the candlelight cast over the dark walls. Once or twice he took the letter given by Hyacinthe St. Croix out of his pocket and fingered and scrutinised it, thinking the while—thinking.

And from without came the remote sounds of the students fighting, shouting, tussling with the train-bands in the name of William of Orange.

Florent Van Mander almost envied men who could be so simple.

CHAPTER III

MASTER AND PUPIL

“DO you accompany M. de Witt to-day?” asked Van Ouveualler.

Florent replied without looking up—

“Yes.”

“I think he will be out of humour,” remarked the other secretary,—“I do not mean angry, like other men, but sad.”

The note of admiration in his voice was marked. Florent continued docketing the papers, letters from England, before him; Van Ouveualler, who had just entered the library, stood against the desk looking down at him.

“It is this pastor,” he continued. “He has very ill repaid M. de Witt’s courtesy.”

“Mynheer the Pastor Simon Simonides?” inquired Florent. “I saw him—why did he come here?”

“By the order of Their High Mightinesses,” answered the other, with some satisfaction, “to ask M. de Witt’s pardon for a sermon he preached some days ago—before you came to the Hague.”

Florent glanced up.

“A treasonable sermon?”

“He strove to stir the people into sedition by accusing them of ingratitude to the Prince of Orange, and spoke very burningly against the Republic.”

“He looked sour and fierce,” said Florent, “but M. de Witt was very gracious to him.”

“Too gracious,” returned Van Ouveualler, with some heat. “He said as sole reproof—‘Mynheer, you have outstepped

your duty, which is to heal, not to create, discord," and with that made him stay to dinner. But the old man was not softened; he left as hot against us as he had come."

"Why should M. de Witt care?" asked Florent.

Van Oudenaller slightly smiled.

"You do not know him; he cannot bear to feel any against him—if he thinks the people dislike, distrust him, it strikes at his heart. It is the same with the Prince. I swear that since Mynheer took over His Highness' education his one idea has been to gain his friendship."

The speaker's worn, plain face lit; it was clear he admired his master—to a foolish extent Florent thought.

Van Oudenaller spoke again.

"You have not seen the Prince?"

"No—I am curious."

The older secretary made no answer. He fixed his eyes on the picture of the garden seen through the straight window, with the afternoon sunshine in the trees and the figure of Agneta de Witt seated in the shade, spinning, her brass-bound Bible beside her.

Florent gazed too.

"This must be dull for M. de Witt's children."

Van Oudenaller answered quickly—

"They do not live here, but with M. de Witt's sister, at Dordt. This is a visit."

"Then without them," smiled Florent, "this great house must be very dull indeed."

"It is quiet," said Van Oudenaller simply, "but one is too immersed in affairs to notice it; and M. de Witt will always live quietly now Madame de Witt is dead."

Then he drew out his watch and added, in a changed tone—

"M. de Witt will be waiting for you—have you the papers?"

Florent put them into the red velvet bag that went daily to and fro in the Hague, containing, as a foreigner remarked, half scornful, half admiring, "the most important documents in Europe," took his hat and cloak from the wall, saluted Van Oudenaller and stepped into the hall. He did not need to

betake himself to the Grand Pensionary's private cabinet, for John de Witt came down the wide, pleasant stairs with his hat on.

"You are punctual." He smiled, drawing on his gloves slowly. He was entirely in black save for his falling lace collar, and looked pale and tired. "I have been a little delayed to-day. We go first, Mynheer Van Mander, to His Highness' house"—he avoided pointedly the word "palace,"—"afterwards to the Binnenhof."

Florent ventured on no comment. He half resented the notable simplicity with which the Grand Pensionary of the United Provinces walked through the streets of the Hague attended only by himself carrying the famous red bag. Of what use was power, he thought, if it but meant the taking up of an enormous weight of cares and anxieties and receiving in return the treatment of an ordinary burgher citizen?

John de Witt did not speak as they went along, and it was with an absorbed, though courteous, air that he returned the many salutations bestowed. Florent wondered what he was reflecting upon, and if the grim unfriendliness of the old Calvinist pastor still troubled him. Then, as they reached the low buildings of the Palace, he snatched his own thoughts to the moment. He must have his wits about him—there was St. Croix's letter.

They were received by Mynheer Van Ghent, the Prince's governor, in a fine but gloomy chamber with a painted ceiling.

Half the Palace, considered now the property of the State, was locked up, and the Prince allowed but the use of one wing. To Florent the room had an air of mournful splendour—built for a palace and used as a prison—there was a sense of sombre dreariness over the whole building; the furniture was scant and plain, there were no pictures on the walls, and the bookcases, plain and austere, held volumes of a severe look and character, mostly on mathematics or tactics.

A gloomy place for a young man to live in, watched by enemies; a dreary place for a Prince to be brought up in,

surrounded by cold faces, by suspicion, distrust, and enmity; a cheerless habitation for the heir to a ruined House, friendless, early orphaned, and forced to guard his every word and look.

M. de Witt's policy might be that of conciliation and concession; he might hold out his hand sincerely, and with his heart in it, but it was not easy to imagine life as very pleasant for the young Prince in these stern environments.

Mynheer Van Ghent talked a little with the Grand Pensionary. Florent had heard that the Prince hated his governor; it was common knowledge that he had fallen ill of chagrin when forced to part with his former tutor, his uncle Mynheer de Zuylestein. Florent therefore observed Mynheer Van Ghent closely, and found in him nothing displeasing, but rather a kind of melancholy austerity and a gentle demeanour.

He stood a little apart from him and his master, and could not hear what the two were saying; their voices were low and guarded. He wondered where the Prince was; if he would see him; if he would, possibly, be able to convey Pomponne's letter . . .

The heavy door at the end of the room, which was not far from him, opened quietly; a young man stepped into the apartment and closed the door after him.

Florent was startled, taken aback, confused. The young man regarded him out of a pair of remarkable eyes, gave him a slow, mournful, unsmiling glance, and seemed to hesitate.

Florent was not sure. The youth was plainly, even shabbily dressed, and looked too grave and tall for seventeen.

But de Witt turned and held out his hand.

"I find Your Highness well?" he inquired.

William of Orange crossed the room.

"I am very well," he answered respectfully. He bent his head to his governor and to the Grand Pensionary. "Will you come into the other room to-day, Mynheer?" he added. "I have desired a fire there."

Florent Van Mander was studying him greedily now, cursing

himself, too, for a lost chance. That moment when the Prince entered he could have slipped the package into his very hand if only he had known him at first sight. He drew the letter out of his pocket, watching the Prince the while.

M. de Witt had his back to him.

Certainly His Highness was tall for his age, and with none of the awkwardness of boyhood; he was elegant rather, delicately made, and carried himself with an air of unnatural, almost dangerous, quiet and control.

Despite his plain dress and subdued manner, he was not in the least insignificant, but of a noticeable and princely appearance. To Florent, even at this first glance, a personality masterful and attractive.

The three came down the room towards the secretary, the Prince a little in advance.

Florent could note his face, pale and clear complexioned, with a high-arched nose and curved lips set firmly, wonderful eyes, hazel green, large and brilliant under dark reddish brows, and a low white forehead shaded with heavy auburn curls that fell on to his linen collar,—M. de Witt's secretary had that swift impression of the Prince and as swift an inspiration. He stooped as if to pick something up.

"Your Highness dropped this," he said as the Prince reached him. He held out his handkerchief, concealed in it the Frenchman's letter.

William of Orange turned his head. There was a look about his brow and mouth as if he controlled incessant pain, but neither that nor the expression of gravity that made him appear old for his years could destroy the charm of his youth. His eyes fixed on Florent.

"Thank you, Mynheer," he said, and put out his small, aristocratic hand.

Florent thrilled as their fingers touched. The Prince slipped the handkerchief into his pocket and passed on.

Now that it was done Florent marvelled that he had had the temerity to venture it. The Prince, though he must have known that it was not his handkerchief, and have felt at once the

packet inside the cambric, gave not the slightest sign of discomposure. It was perfectly done; Florent saw in it the training of one brought up amid spies and enemies—but he had risked something in taking this youth's prudence so for granted.

The Prince did not look at the secretary again, but passed into the next chamber with M. de Witt.

As he closed the door he gave a sharp glance at the Grand Pensionary, then crossed to a little table by the window and seated himself there.

They were in a small room, lit by a fire that burnt pleasantly between the andirons on the blue-tiled hearth. The walls were hung with stamped leather; in one corner stood a globe, and beside it a desk covered with maps and plans.

M. de Witt took the chair by the fireplace and turned so that he faced the Prince. His sad, tender eyes were fixed with an almost yearning expression on the graceful figure of the young man who, half leaning against the desk, sat waiting, in an expressionless, quiet attitude.

The Grand Pensionary loosened his heavy cloak.

"We will have no lesson to-day, Highness," he said. "I have to speak of practical politics—and am here to talk gravely with you."

"That is as you wish, Mynheer," answered William. He had a voice naturally changeful and musical, but, like his eyes and his movements, it was controlled to a cold expressionlessness.

"I hope that it will also be your wish," said M. de Witt, "when I tell you that it is of the affairs of Holland I desire to speak."

"I am always at the disposal of Their High Mightinesses," replied William, with the slightest inflection of sarcasm.

John de Witt made an open gesture with his fine right hand as if to sweep aside all formality and convention.

"It must not be like this between us, Highness," he said, with great gentle sweetness. "Of late you have met me somewhat coldly. Why?"

William sat up slowly, his eyes were averted.

"I have often assured you, Mynheer," he answered, "of my duty and affection. Have Their High Mightinesses anything to complain of?"

Again there was that faint stress on the pompous title.

M. de Witt regarded him steadily.

"I spoke for myself, Highness, thinking that the services I have rendered you, the affection I have always felt for you might have kept me some place in your esteem."

Still the Prince would not answer the appeal in the words, even by raising his eyes.

"I have always striven," he said, "to express my gratitude to you, Mynheer, for your constant care."

There was a look almost of wonder on the noble face of M. de Witt, as if he could hardly credit the unmoved composure of this boy.

"I have not come, Highness, to exchange with you the language of diplomacy," he said.

William looked up now.

"It is the only language I have had the chance to learn, Mynheer."

John de Witt gazed at him gently and sadly.

"I have never taught you anything but frankness, Highness—I have deserved both your trust and your affection. It has been my dearest wish, my most cherished hope, that I might educate you to become my friend, my ally in the government of the United Provinces."

The Prince made the slightest movement and again averted his eyes.

"You are no child now," continued M. de Witt; "and must fairly well understand your position . . . and mine."

"I understand both, Mynheer," answered William.

"You have been educated as a citizen of Holland, and it is to the citizen of Holland that I have come to speak to-day." M. de Witt paused a moment. He was slightly flushed, and his voice was full of emotion. "I have striven to make you worthy of your grandfather and of that ancestor

of yours who secured us our liberty, and it is my wish to obtain for you those dignities that are the heritage of your House—all that are compatible with the safety of this Republic."

William, still looking away, spoke slowly—

"The Republic has nothing to fear from me, Mynheer, I, surely, am of but little account in the State."

M. de Witt was observing him very closely.

"You have the name, Highness," he said; "you must know that. And it is a power, you must know that also. You are the heir of the family that once ruled Holland, and you are used as the rallying point of all the malcontents."

William glanced up with a curious, intense expression.

"You speak very frankly, Mynheer."

"I have no object to serve by dissimulation," answered John de Witt. "I come to you single-mindedly. I can claim to have always spoken openly to you, Highness, since you first were of an age to understand these matters."

He paused, bending his eyes on the Prince. His manner and speech were weighty. His entire thought, his entire energy seemed concentrated on what he said; as if he, the great and lofty statesman, strove by sheer force of strength of character to overwhelm, rouse, and conquer the impassive youth before him.

"Openly I spoke to you once before, Highness. When Their High Mightinesses passed the Perpetual Edict I told you that we abolished the office of the Stadtholder out of regard for the liberty of the country. I assured you of my friendship—but I told you plainly that we would risk no recurrence of 1650."

The Prince coughed slightly and lowered his eyes.

"I remember, Mynheer, very well."

"And now, again, I have to speak of the safety of the United Provinces, Highness."

William answered without moving—

"What have I to do, Mynheer, with the safety of the State?"

"I will make that clear to you," said John de Witt gravely. "I cannot tell how much you know of what this party does in your name; I refuse to believe that you encourage them——"

"Could I have been more dutiful to the State, more quiet than I have been?" interrupted William. He gave no sign of any feeling or agitation save that the wild-rose colour of delicate health had deepened in his thin cheeks.

"You have been too quiet," answered the Grand Pensionary. "I want you to act, Highness."

He waited a second, but the Prince did not speak.

"I am greatly troubled," continued M. de Witt, with a stately simplicity, "by these men who strive to hinder and oppose the Government. You know their names, Count Frederick William, M. Beverningh, M. Zuylestein, M. Fagel——"

"None of these are my friends save M. Zuylestein," returned the Prince; "and you have good cause to know, Mynheer, that I see nothing of him——"

"M. Zuylestein left your service because I doubted his loyalty to the Republic," said John de Witt sternly; "and now he works discord in Zeeland. And for the others, whether you know it or not, they traffic in your name, Highness."

"In what manner, Mynheer?"

"In what manner?—they meddle with France and England, they sow dissension in the town councils, in the Assembly itself; they riot in the street—I think that you must know it, Highness. . . . Every reasonable concession hath been made, but no reasonable concession will content them. It was agreed that the question of the Captain-Generalship, of the seat in the Council of State, should be postponed until you were of age; they agitate for these honours now—you must know this also, Highness."

The Prince glanced at him sideways, then looked very quickly down again.

"In Zeeland, where you are premier noble, your partisans make the excuse of your titles of Ter Veere and Flushing to demand your appearance in their council now they consider

you of age." And for the third time he added—"You must know this, Highness."

He paused impressively, and his eyes were dark and ardently commanding on the Prince.

William put his hand to his brow as if he made a mechanical movement to ease a constant pain there.

"What do you wish me to do?" he asked quietly.

M. de Witt answered at once—

"I want you to disown this party—they may act without your sanction, they cannot act in face of your disapproval—I want you as an ally, as a friend——"

"I am powerless as either, Mynheer," returned the Prince; "and," he suddenly turned his wonderful eyes on the Grand Pensionary, "since you designate these you speak of as my friends, to what in me do you appeal to act against them?"

There was a flash of imperiousness in his tone new to M. de Witt. It was almost the manner of a king to a subject; it gave the Grand Pensionary the bewildered sense that he, with twenty years' experience of affairs and the management of men, was not equal to this boy whom he had seen grow up, whom he had himself educated.

"I appeal to you as a citizen of the Republic," he said. "I have not brought you up to put yourself before your country—" he hesitated a moment before continuing, "I have always thought you of too great a nature to prefer the phantom of personal aggrandisement to the good of the Commonwealth——"

It seemed as if, on an impulse, William was about to speak, but he checked himself, and M. de Witt went on—

"Will you let yourself, Highness, be used to stir up faction in the State?—will you be an instrument in the hands of ambitious place-seekers?"

"I cannot help my birth, Mynheer," answered the Prince, "nor prevent the people from using my name."

He had not lowered his clear, brilliant glance, and the two pairs of eyes met across the small, firelit room. John de Witt's

met a fathomless, inscrutable look, and a horrible mistrust of this too composed youth crept into his mind—a distrust he had known before and always fought against and dismissed—

But William of Orange was the nephew of Charles of England and the cousin of Louis of France.

“I believe France meditates the destruction of the United Provinces,” De Witt said suddenly. “Colbert envies our commerce and King Louis is mad for conquest. . . . I do not trust England.”

The Prince, never altering his easy attitude, nor changing the level tones of his voice, nor in any way taking heed of the feeling that surged behind de Witt’s words, put his hand slowly to his breast, where, in the pocket of his black waistcoat, lay the letter wrapped in Florent Van Mander’s handkerchief.

“What has this to do with the object of your coming, Mynheer?” he asked.

The Grand Pensionary found the almost unnatural composure and control of this boy agitating him; the colour came into his face.

“France might seize any pretext,” he said. “Any pretext—if we are to stand we must be united——”

William slightly raised his fine red brows.

“So distinguished a statesman as yourself, Mynheer—will know how to meet any misfortune that threatens you.”

M. de Witt regarded him earnestly. Had he failed—had the royal breed been too powerful for all his careful training? He thought he traced in the commanding eyes and curved mouth of the Prince the arrogance, the hauteur of regal blood, not so easy to quench or overcome—had he failed? . . . Many had foretold he would. Had he undertaken too confidently the task of making into a staunch, loyal republican the heir of the oldest House in Europe, the son of a man who had risked all in an attempt at sovereign power and of a woman too proud to speak to a commoner . . .

“You speak as if with hate of me,” he said, and there was

a half sad confession of failure in the words. "But for Holland—you love Holland?"

William was leaning against the side of his chair, resting his hand on the arm of it.

"Both you and my country, Mynheer," he replied, "have my duty and my affection; my position makes me powerless to help either . . ."

M. de Witt gave him a flashing glance.

"You can serve your country, Highness, by withdrawing from all association with these noisy partisans of yours—by letting it be known that you do not desire to be regarded as the Prince of Orange, heir to an extinct office, but as a citizen of the United Provinces."

The Prince coughed, and again put his hand to his head. The delicate colour had faded from his face, he was pale to the lips.

"You best qualify yourself for the offices that may one day be yours by quiet study and severe application," continued M. de Witt. "Not by endeavouring to thrust yourself (upon the selfish suggestions of sordid ambition) into power for which your youth renders you unfit, and into places from which the law debars you."

William gave one of his rare, slow smiles; it seemed to rob the Grand Pensionary's speech of half its weight and meaning.

"My docility hath not deserved this, Mynheer," he said. "Half the people at the Hague would not know me if they saw me, and you accuse me of endeavouring to win the suffrage of the mob——"

"No," interrupted De Witt. "No . . ."

"You accuse me," continued William, "of selfish ambition. . . . I have not lifted a finger to alter my position—I have always been the humble servant of yourself, Mynheer, and Their High Mightinesses."

"This is evasion," said the Grand Pensionary in a mournful anger. "I came to Your Highness with an appeal—will you work with me or no?"

"I am always at your service," answered the Prince.

It seemed that in no way could M. de Witt break through this even, immovable courtesy. His anger began to rise against a nature that could turn to him this hard reserve. He recalled his patient services, his honest attempt to win the Prince, his frankness towards the Orange party, his loyal endeavour that his young ward should not suffer for the misfortune of his House, his eagerness to establish a friendship with the Prince so that one day they might work together for the good of the land. Now it would seem all this had largely been in vain. The first time he put it to the issue he found that he dealt with intractable, unyielding, perhaps treacherous, material . . . treacherous—that stinging thought, not to be banished, roused him almost unbearably.

"You shut me out of your confidence, Highness," he said. "You will neither trust me nor be frank with me. . . . I do not know what policy you pursue, nor whose advice you follow in refusing to treat me as what I have ever endeavoured to be—your friend. . . . I do not know, I say, your counsellors, but I think they advise you ill . . ."

"I follow mine own counsels, Mynheer."

John de Witt rose; the firelight cast the leaping shadow of his tall, stately figure upon the wall behind him.

"I have been very patient,"—his voice was strong, full of emotion,—“but I have the dignity of the Republic to consider . . . and if I thought——”

He caught himself up. The Prince raised his eyes, and their expression goaded de Witt.

"What did Buat die for?" he asked.

William answered calmly—

"For selling the secrets of Holland to France."

"For betraying his country, Highness; and he was of the Orange party. Madame Buat is one of their most active agents now. But I have had enough of it . . . if you dare——"

The Prince sprang lightly to his feet.

"—If you dare, Highness," repeated De Witt sternly, "the Republic will know how to act."

"Mynheer de Witt," said William in a stifled voice, "what do you mean?"

"Have you dealings with your uncle Charles Stewart? Are you secretly tampering with the agents of France?" demanded the Grand Pensionary. "There is my meaning."

He paused. The Prince did not alter the hard quiet of his manner, though his great eyes showed a tumult of feeling.

"What right have you to ask that of me?" he demanded.

The words were a challenge, as such M. de Witt answered them.

"Your father sought foreign aid when he attempted the liberties of Holland——"

Like a sword swiftly unsheathed the Prince's passion slipped his control—

"I will not hear of my father from you, Mynheer," he cried. "For what he did I have paid . . . and for your insults——" His words were checked in a fit of coughing that shook his frail frame, he had to support himself against the back of the chair. This evidence of the ill health that decided many doctors in declaring he could not live long instantly softened the noble heart of John de Witt, touched also by the Prince's quick anger.

"Forgive me," he said. "I had no right—I ask your pardon, Highness."

William sank into his chair, pulled out his handkerchief and pressed it to his lips; he still coughed a little.

"Forgive *me*," he answered, quiet again, but breathing with difficulty. "I forgot myself. . . . I have taken so much," he added, "I might well have taken that. But it is not often, Mynheer, that I fail to recognise your position and . . . mine."

The words hurt M. de Witt.

"I would not be your master but your friend," he said eagerly. "Trust me and I will do more for you than these ill-judged factions . . ."

William looked round; his face was colourless, and he held himself as if exhausted.

"Mynheer," he said, speaking with something of an effort, "I do not know why you think I am occupied in stirring up sedition in the State. You know how I spend every moment of my time; I have no opportunity nor—desire. I am your very good friend and the servant of Their Noble Mightinesses. . . . I have, obviously, no influence with the party that you speak of. As for my uncle and my cousin of France, they do not make me their confidant . . . not counting me, doubtless, of sufficient importance."

John de Witt looked him in the eyes with a deep, questioning glance.

"Have I satisfied you, Mynheer?" asked the Prince courteously.

The Grand Pensionary could press no further. He was half baffled, half angered; yet he found himself remembering that this Prince, who was behaving so like a veteran diplomat, was in fact only a boy, often ill and lonely.

"I came with no suspicions," he said. "Only to put before you, Highness, something of the state of the Republic and to ask your help——"

"If I can ever be of service I shall be glad," answered William. He looked up, and added abruptly, "Mynheer de Witt, might Mynheer Cornelius Triglandt come back?—I would rather have him for my chaplain than any man I know."

M. de Witt was taken by surprise, but he had his reply ready.

"M. Triglandt was removed from your person for the same reason as M. Zuytlestein," he said gently. "He hath an unruly tongue and a heart disloyal to the Republic. Their High Mightinesses could not allow his return. If you esteemed him, I am sorry."

William was silent.

The Grand Pensionary glanced at the bronze clock on the mantelshelf.

"I have outstayed my time—I am due, Highness, at the Binnenhof."

The Prince rose.

"Next time," continued M. de Witt, "I will examine you in your studies. Till then I commend what I have said to your consideration. . . . Think of them always, Highness, as the words of a sincere friend."

"I am grateful, Mynheer."

The Grand Pensionary went to the door, and there hesitated.

"Believe me," he said, looking back, "in the matter of Mynheer Triglandt I would gladly pleasure you . . . it is the will of the States."

William bent his head.

John de Witt opened the door in silence and was gone.

The Prince remained by the table; a long breath escaped him and a bright look shone under his heavy lids. He cried to himself in the words used by the great Philip to his ancestor—

"Not the States, but you! you!"

Then he sank into the chair again, resting his elbow on the table and his head in his hand, while he drew from his pocket the letter given him by Florent Van Mander. He looked at the writing and the seals, then replaced it in his waistcoat.

He coughed slightly and glanced towards the door which had closed on the Grand Pensionary.

"Not the States," he repeated, "but you, Mynheer de Witt, you!"

CHAPTER IV

M. DE WITT'S SECRETARY

FLORENT VAN MANDER sat at his desk by the open window and looked out on to the garden of M. de Witt.

The mysterious, damp, and misty days of autumn had set in. Thin sea vapours blew from morning till night across the Hague ; the sunshine was faint as if it came from a great distance.

No fire burnt in the library, but the secretary had quietly set the window open, heedless of the chilly air.

For M. de Witt was walking in the garden talking to his brother, M. Cornelius de Witt, Ruard of Putten, who had come up to-day from Dordt, and Florent was listening to their conversation as it came clearly through the tranquil stillness.

"If you do not send more troops, brother," the Ruard was saying, "I think Zeeland will get beyond all management. Count Tilly would be the man to quiet them."

"I cannot spare Tilly from the Hague," answered the softer voice of the Grand Pensionary. "And I have written to the burgomaster of Middelburg."

"You hold the reins too gently," returned Cornelius de Witt. "I think the Prince is in touch with these agitators in Zeeland——"

"It is hardly possible . . . he is kept too close . . ."

"You should keep him closer. Are you sure of those about him?"

"They are of mine own choice—even to his gentlemen."

"Well," said the Ruard grimly, "he may have corrupted them."

Florent leant forward cautiously. The brothers had halted

close to the window. The Grand Pensionary's back was towards him, but he could see the fine, rugged face of the Ruard, frowning now, and shaded by the great black beaver he wore.

"I have his assurance of loyalty," said John de Witt. "I do not think he is of a nature to be false . . . he is quiet——"

"Take care he be not as cunning as he is quiet."

"I have no right to think it," answered the Grand Pensionary.

There was impatience in his brother's reply.

"You have always been *too* just . . . the time has gone past for concessions . . ."

They moved on slowly; Van Mander could hear their footsteps on the gravel but not what they said.

He had had his dismissal for the day; probably M. de Witt thought he had already gone. He locked his desk and put on his hat and cloak, then softly shut the window.

Before he left the building he went upstairs to M. de Witt's private cabinet to return some papers he had copied for M. Van den Bosch, the head secretary, who, in company with the two confidential clerks, M. Bacherus and M. Van Oudenaller, always sat there.

Van Mander returned to the hall with a dislike of these busy, quiet, dry men so intent on serving their master—machines he called them, what could they ever hope to rise to?—and they had all the secrets of M. de Witt in their hands.

There would be a game worth playing supposing that *he* possessed the keys of those desks. But they never entrusted him with anything of importance—save yesterday when he had carried the red velvet bag——

His mind leapt back to the letter he had given the Prince. He stepped out of John de Witt's pink brick house into the sea-mist that was increasing as the sun set, and turned in the direction of the Nieuwe Kerk which lay towards the gates.

The vapour rested lightly on the water of the Vyver, and clung to the yellowing chestnut trees that surrounded it; beyond rose the straight walls of the Binnenhof, dimly seen, looming darkly from the mist.

Florent crossed the empty Plaats. Before him the threatening lines of the blunt roof of the Gevangenpoort, the prison gate, seemed to spring from out the fast thickening fog as if they were shaped from dark clouds and had no foundation on the earth. One barred window showed in the gloomy structure, and above it the flag of the Republic glimpsed through the obscurity.

Florent passed under the low, deep arch and came out into the Buitenhof. The soldiers on duty here, the few passers-by, seemed unreal and remote, so wrapped about and mysterious were they rendered by the damp, encroaching mist.

Florent was impressed, subdued by the silent, all-pervading personality of the town wearing the sea-fog like a veil over her ancient glories—like a veil of mourning, maybe, for her coming downfall. All the splendour of the Seven Provinces, all their strength, their endurance, their simplicity, their heroism were symbolised in these buildings, rising staunch and heavy through the sad, dripping fog. The gables and turrets of the Hall of the Knights; the tourelles and pale brick of the Binnenhof, with the bright painted shutters faintly showing, and here and there a light gleaming at a window; and above all the great tower of the Groote Kerk rising through the fog that the sea, ever beating on the shores and dykes of Holland with a persistent and sinister purpose, sends rolling drearily over the land it cannot yet reclaim.

Florent traversed the courts of the Binnenhof, and entered the Spuistraat, where the street-lamps and the lights in the shops cast faint haloes on the mist; here he followed the canal that led to the Nieuwe Kerk.

Crossing the bridge, under which slow barges passed winding along the grey water, through the grey land towards Ryswysk, he circled the clumsy, grim church, and discovered behind it, at the corner of Bezemstraat, the Nieuwe Doelen.

There in the quiet, plain back parlour of the inn he found Hyacinthe St. Croix.

Florent greeted him with his habitual brevity and went to the fire. He was chilled, his garments damp; even here the

mist had penetrated, and filled the room with a salt sense of wet and cold.

St. Croix ordered dinner and, leaning back, surveyed his company.

Florent looked up suddenly. The firelight stained his linen collar, his pale face, to ruddiness.

"I delivered your letter."

The Frenchman answered, not allowing himself to show any satisfaction—

"I thought you would."

Florent was silent a while, rubbing his hands together over the blaze.

"How do you hope to receive an answer?" he said at last.

"If the Prince wishes to send one he will contrive it."

Florent started at that.

"We are quite safe here," remarked St. Croix easily. "This is M. le Marquis' house."

"Ah!" Florent glanced round the small, neat room, with the herbs hanging from the beams, the blue-and-white pottery, the shining brass,—an inn room like a hundred others. "M. le Marquis does it very well," he said.

"Naturally," smiled St. Croix. "What was your opinion of the Prince?" he added.

Florent ignored the question.

"I was wondering," he said slowly, "how the Prince could communicate with any one—he is kept marvellously close."

St. Croix shrugged his shoulders.

"I said he would contrive,—I think he is as clever as M. de Witt."

Florent reflected on the words he had heard the Grand Pensionary use that evening to his brother.

"Those about him are all of M. de Witt's choosing," he said.

"The Prince might win some—one of them."

Florent looked up quickly.

"Do you imagine him the sort of man to win—devotion?"

"I do not know. What is your opinion?"

Florent smiled rather sourly.

"I suppose some would serve him from policy, because they saw a restoration," he answered; "but he is greatly beloved in Holland."

"He has done nothing to win the suffrage of the people."

"No," said Florent; "he has done nothing."

"It is the name," resumed St. Croix lightly, "and the prestige of the House of Orange."

Supper was brought in, and more candles. Florent crossed to the window.

Outside the mist was rolling past like waves, white and curling. The sound of the struggling, large poles could be heard through it; the noise of the wet mast striking the wet deck as it was lowered to pass under the bridge, and the men's voices, shouting to each other, hoarse, remote.

Florent glanced askance over his shoulder at St. Croix. A man who was despising him, no doubt, as one of a fallen race; anticipating the time when the King of France would be master of Holland—the dictator of Europe. He began to find that he hated St. Croix, and that he was angry with himself for being there, playing into the Frenchman's hands.

He thought of the quiet, worn men in M. de Witt's Cabinet whom he had, at the moment, so despised. Now he was ready to wish his hands as clean as theirs. He resented the look of insolent superiority he thought to read in the powdered face of Hyacinthe St. Croix.

But the Frenchman spoke pleasantly—

"Will you not come to dinner?"

Florent silently complied. He found that the little inn, supported by the pay of M. le Marquis de Pomponne, provided of the best; food and wine were both better than he was accustomed to. This further set him against St. Croix, who was buying him in this paltry way as surely as was William of Orange being bought by the power and wealth of France and England.

"What was in that letter I delivered?" he demanded suddenly.

Hyacinthe St. Croix gave answer with a fine appearance of frankness—

"You have heard of the feeling in Zeeland?—His Highness is its premier noble, and, now that he is in his eighteenth year, the people consider him of age—and desire him to take his seat in the Council there——"

"M. de Witt would never allow it."

"Mon Dieu, no, M. de Witt would never allow it—but it is possible that Monseigneur the Prince might act without permission."

"Ah!" said Florent. He leant back, his hand round his wineglass, his eyes fixed across the candles' shine on the Frenchman's face. "And M. le Marquis would help him in this?"

"Making of it a challenge, the glove thrown down," assented Hyacinthe St. Croix. "It would be a bold move for His Highness to make. If he once outwits M. de Witt he opens his eyes for always, and there can be no more confidence between them; yet maybe he would hazard it——"

"Under the protection of France," interrupted Florent.

"You wonder we think it worth while," returned St. Croix quickly, "but there are many reasons. . . . This young man is His Majesty's cousin, and M. de Louvois sees how good use may be made of him. He is already of some influence in the State, and his party grows."

"M. de Pomponne is ready to help him to raise revolt in Middelburg?"

"Yes."

"Is M. Temple in this?" asked Florent abruptly.

St. Croix smiled.

"He is like M. de Witt, hopelessly honest."

Florent emptied his glass slowly.

"We have made overtures to the Princess of Orange, but she is old and cautious," continued St. Croix. "Also to M. de Zuylenstein and Prince John Maurice. The letter you passed to Monseigneur the Prince contained an offer on the part of M. le Marquis to connive at his escape to Middelburg."

"How could it be done?" mused Florent.

"M. le Marquis could accomplish it—M. Van Ghent is away——"

Florent looked up sharply.

"Yes, he left on a visit to his estate in Guelders to-day. The Prince hath then thrown in his lot with you—" he added, "put himself under the protection of France?"

"Mon Dieu, what else is there for him to do?"

Florent pushed back his chair. He had eaten very little, nor did St. Croix press it, though he had dined well himself after an indifferent, easy fashion that nettled his guest.

"Ugh! this mist of yours," shivered the Frenchman suddenly glancing about the room. "Nothing will keep it out—how much of it do you have?"

"I am new to the Hague, but there is plenty of it, until we get the frosts—then too, sometimes."

St. Croix made a wry face.

"I would the Holy Virgin had placed my talents elsewhere. Here there is nothing wherewith to amuse one's self save the contemplation of Dutch virtue and the effort to avoid rheumatism. How do you endure it, my friend?"

"By being Dutch," answered Florent, gazing at him steadily "You speak very plainly to me—I am Dutch."

St. Croix laughed.

"You think me overbold. But I tell you this, my master is more powerful in the Seven Provinces than any Dutchman—as you are ambitious you had best not offend him."

So, they threatened—they felt themselves strong enough for that.

"I have my own interests at heart," commented Florent dryly, after a pause. "I see that the Orange party is the one to serve. . . . I shall serve it, knowing quite well, M. St. Croix, that it is another name for France."

The Frenchman blinked his fair eyes.

"His Highness may be called the lever with which His Majesty will heave the United Provinces on to the map of France," he remarked.

"You seem very sure of him," said Florent, "and I believe that you are right. But . . . it is curious in all the discussions concerning this Prince, whose name we all use alike to serve our ends—among all the factions that clamour for William of Orange—is there never one to think of him as other than the tool of France? Does it never enter the thoughts of any that he might prove as honest as M. de Witt—as faithful to his country?"

"This is not an age of heroes," smiled St. Croix; and added, half insolently, "Do you regret the fact, Monsieur?"

"M. de Witt is a hero."

"M. de Witt is a saint and a fool," replied the Frenchman. "And the Prince of Orange is neither."

"Some must believe in him . . ."

"As an instrument to gratify their ambition. M. Beverningh, M. de Zuylestein, and Prince John Maurice believe in him certainly—after that fashion."

"I do not mean them—but these people in the street—Jacob Van der Graef——"

"A silly young man," remarked St. Croix, lighting his pipe. "Yes, perhaps those people do believe in the glory of the old dynasty. But things have changed since the days of William the Taciturn; as I say, there are no heroes nowadays."

Florent suddenly shrugged his shoulders.

"These are foolish matters for us to be discussing. You know where my interests lie, Monsieur; and," he added, with a strange note of defiance, "you have pointed out that safety also rests with my silence. You need not fear that I should betray you to M. de Witt, or be over faithful to him. I, at least, am not a fool."

"I think you are shrewd enough," answered St. Croix, "and I have trusted you with a delicate matter. The way to your fortune is plain: for the present, stay where you are, keep quiet and docile to M. de Witt."

Florent smiled.

"He is not difficult to fool," he said grimly, "—M. de Witt.

"No," assented St. Croix, lazily watching his rings of smoke ; "but he is difficult to lie to."

Florent was silent ; a dusky colour flushed into his cheeks.

"M. le Marquis," continued the Frenchman, "hath told me that he finds the Grand Pensionary more troublesome to deal with than any clever rogue."

"Yet he is simple, credulous," said Florent. "See, in this matter of the Prince, how he trusts him."

"He hath his own wisdom," answered St. Croix ; "but his day is over."

He looked shrewdly at the young secretary, and added—

"I must bring you to speech of M. le Marquis."

Florent made no answer ; he rose.

"You are going?" asked St. Croix, leaning indolently on the table.

"I have some work to do—M. de Witt must not find me amiss."

It was not the truth ; the secretary's duties ended when he quitted the Grand Pensionary's house, but St. Croix accepted the excuse.

"You will hear from me again in a day or so," he said.

"The lodgings in the Kerkestraat will always find you?"

"Yes."

Florent picked up his hat and cloak from the bench that ran round the wall and turned to leave.

"I shall keep my eyes and ears alert," he said. "Good-night."

"Good-night," nodded St. Croix. "A sullen brute," he thought as the door closed on Florent. "But these Dutchmen,"—he shrugged his shoulders,—"one must use them as one finds them . . ."

Florent Van Mander cared nothing what impression he had made ; his one desire was to get away, to be alone. He welcomed the cold white fog after the brightly lit parlour and the intolerable Frenchman sitting there over his wine. He hated it and all it symbolised ; hated it so suddenly and so bitterly that he could not have stayed a second longer

in the company of the man whom, for his own ends, he was serving.

Such emotions were quite new to him; he could not understand them. He had always despised people who allowed sentiment to interfere with ambition. One could not be great by following a falling cause. . . . What should it matter to him, a diplomat, whether he was paid by England or France or Holland, so he achieved his aim?

Fortune was not attained by sitting in M. de Witt's Cabinet, like M. Van den Bosch; and the Grand Pensionary had not inspired Florent with any great enthusiasm or admiration. He had judged him coldly, seen failure ahead of him, and decided not to entangle his fortunes with the Republican Government. But nevertheless he felt this strange wrath, and distaste, against himself and what he did. It was as if something had suddenly touched and aroused feelings that lay so deep he did not know till now that he possessed them.

The Seven Provinces an appanage of France—they who had been the richest nation in Europe——

Florent checked his thoughts, wondering what had put into his mind—this folly.

Almost he imagined that the brief moment in which he had looked into the eyes of William of Orange had awakened him to this uneasy questioning. Yet that made double folly, since the Prince himself was but the tool of France, intriguing with de Pomponne—truckling to Louis . . .

He had walked through the mist, along the Spuistraat, with no thought of his destination, but when he reached the Binnenhof he pulled himself up and stopped.

The lamps showing at intervals on their red posts displayed the fog in great pale circles, but their light did not penetrate far, and Florent realised that he began to take note of what he was doing in a thick, hurrying darkness of vapour no moon could pierce. The canal had ceased, and he knew that he must be by the Binnenhof. No one seemed abroad; the fog gave the effect of complete isolation.

Keeping close to the stone wall of the building, he made his way through the black arch of the Gevangenpoort on to the Plaats.

Here the closer-set street lights revealed the railings encircling the Vyver. Florent followed them a little way, then, gathering his cloak closely round him, paused and looked down on to the water, an abyss of fathomless darkness which, where the feeble rays of the lamp struck it, revealed billows of curling mist, which seemed to be sucked down into measureless depths of obscurity.

Florent leant against the railing, as completely shut away from the world as if in a secret chamber. All ordinary sights and sounds had receded, vanished; he could not even discern the lights in the Binnenhof or Maritshuis. His hair was wet his hat limp with damp; beads of moisture clung to his heavy frieze cloak, he could feel the water trickling under his collar, and there was a salt taste on his lips. He stood quite still watching the twisting, striving thickness of vapour disclosed by the beams of the lamp. Then suddenly a light was flashed over him, and a voice, conveying a slightly foreign accent, spoke in a low tone close beside him—

“Are you Mynheer Van Mander, clerk to M. de Witt?”

Florent lifted eyes startled from absorbed contemplation. He saw, through the curtain of the filmy mist, the figure of a man, wearing, like himself, a heavy mantle, and carrying a lantern.

“I am sure that you are,” the speaker continued. “I have been following you a considerable time.”

“For what purpose?” asked Florent.

The stranger, who had loomed up so quietly out of the fog, came a little nearer.

“You were at the Palace yesterday?”

Florent turned to face him.

“Yes.”

The other raised his lantern.

“I am Bromley,” he said simply,—“Matthew Bromley, the

Prince's gentleman, and I have come to give you the answer to the letter that you delivered to His Highness."

Florent bent his brows on him. As far as he could see anything he saw a tall man with a fair, handsome face showing under the broad-brimmed hat.

"Will you hand this to the person who entrusted you to deliver that letter?"

Florent took the packet held out to him.

"If His Highness has servants as devoted as you appear, Mynheer," he said, "you might have conveyed the letter in the first instance."

And he remembered how St. Croix had lamented that he had now no ally in the Prince's household.

"The paper is unsealed," answered Matthew Bromley, "and I think it is His Highness' wish that you read it."

"Read it!" echoed Florent.

The mist seemed to be lifting, blowing in long trails, rapidly, to extinction. The Prince's gentleman hung his lantern on the fence.

"You can read it here and now," he said.

Florent glanced up from the still folded paper.

"You are English?"

"Yes, I am English," answered Bromley.

Florent gazed at him keenly.

"You know something of the Prince's affairs,—do you know why he wishes to make a confidant of me? Why I am to read this?"

Their voices were low and guarded; between them hurried the long veils of fog, blurring the street-lamp and the light of the lantern, in which their figures loomed indistinctly.

"You were aware what M. de Pomponne's message contained?"

"Yes."

"Therefore the Prince wishes you to know his answer."

The lights in the Binnenhof, in the Maritshuis, began to be visible; sparks of yellow showed, too, in the windows of the houses in the Kneuterdyk Avenue; a cold wind was

rising. Florent shivered; with chilled, damp fingers he took the paper from its cover and, bending towards the light, looked at it. The signature caught his eye first.

"This is M. de Pomponne's letter!" he cried.

"It is also the Prince's answer," returned Mr. Bromley.

"You may show it to M. de Witt—if you will."

A swift excitement shook Florent.

"Then . . . what dealings has he—the Prince—with France?"

"You may imagine—he returns M. de Pomponne's letter."

"He is subservient to M. de Witt—he will not go to Middelburg——?"

"He will do nothing under the protection of M. de Pomponne."

The gentle radiance of a young moon conquered the vanishing mist. Florent saw the shapes of the trees on the Vyverberg, the outlines of the Binnenhof, and the tourelles of the Gevangenpoort rising against a clear sky.

"This is a rebuke to me," he said.

"You may take it so," replied Mr. Bromley.

"I am not in the pay of the French," said Florent, instantly aware this man could ruin him with his master, "though I suppose the Prince thinks so,—I work for my own ends, serving no party," he added defiantly.

"The Prince has not thought of you at all, Mynheer, save to desire you to know he hath no secret dealings with M. de Pomponne. You will return that letter?"

"Yes," said Florent, concealing it. He thought, grimly, that he had no choice.

"Then, good-night, Mynheer." Mr. Bromley saluted gravely, took his now useless lantern from the fence and extinguished it.

Florent's pulses were beating quickly; he was bewildered, confounded. There were many things he longed to ask the Prince's gentleman, and not one that he could bring over his tongue. He stood foolishly watching Mr. Bromley disappear through the arch of the Gevangenpoort.

What game was the Prince playing? Was this a pose to deceive him, the secretary of M. de Witt, or did William really prefer the Grand Pensionary for a master rather than France?

Or perhaps he is merely timid, reflected Florent, crushing scornfully down the rush of pride and unreasonable exaltation he had sustained at the wild idea that the Prince was actually spurning M. de Pomponne.

He stared at the dark, tranquil waters of the Vyver, revealed now in the faint moonshine.

A boy, he sneered to himself, would he possess the wit and courage to undertake unaided this flight to Middelburg? No, he had always shown caution—he would remain under the wing of M. de Witt.

Yet Florent found himself pondering over the devotion of Matthew Bromley to his master—Bromley also had once been M. de Witt's man.

CHAPTER V

THE CHALLENGE

A BAR of sunshine fell across the quiet room in the Binnenhof, but it did not touch John de Witt, from head to foot he was in shadow.

The French Ambassador had just left him—a duel of words, an exchange of courtesies; through the formalities one sentence of de Pomponne had leapt.

“If the Prince of Orange gave the signal for a restoration . . . what would rise to answer it?”

“He will never give that signal,” de Witt had answered, and he believed it.

Yet strange it was for him, First Minister of a Republic almost his creation, to reflect upon this fact—the people of that Republic clamoured for the heir of the House that had threatened to set its heel on them.

He moved half restlessly in his chair. If William were indeed working secretly to undermine him he might find his labour of twenty years gone for nothing, and live yet to see his country under foreign dominion.

He rose and went to the window. The Hall of the Knights showed its painted and pointed shutters against a faint blue sky; the trees in the courtyard of the Binnenhof were shedding their leaves, caught by the wind and whirled in eddies that rose a little way then sank again to the ground.

The sunlight fell now directly on the face of John de Witt. It revealed how grey he was growing round the temples, how weary and lined were his eyes.

He was still standing by the window when a tall soldier entered.

"Ah, M. de Montbas!" the Grand Pensionary turned. "I desired to see you about these riots in Zeeland and Groningen."

"You wished me to go there, Mynheer, I think your letter said."

The speaker was a sallow, sickly looking man, with lank hair and dark, unhappy eyes.

"To Groningen—yes."

M. de Witt returned to his seat in the shadow.

"I fear that we have been too lenient," he continued; "the Government must make some show of strength."

"That is only wise," answered the Count de Montbas; "and should, Mynheer, have been done before."

"It has never been my policy to use force where persuasion might prevail," said M. de Witt. "When one is adamant in great things one may be careless in little,—these rioters are mostly ignorant people——"

"They are encouraged by the Prince of Orange," put in de Montbas quickly.

"There I think you are wrong," returned the Grand Pensionary quietly. He knew that ill feeling existed between the House of Orange and M. de Montbas, whose father, an exiled Frenchman, had offered his services to the late Stadtholder only to have them refused.

M. de Montbas gave a half-nervous laugh.

"You are too confident, Mynheer."

The Grand Pensionary ignored the remark and touched a bell upon his table.

"I will read you the report of the disturbances in Zeeland and Goeree," he said.

It was Florent Van Mander who entered with the papers. M. de Witt bade him stay, and he went quietly to the back of the room and waited, observing, with cruel precision, the two men before him.

He had heard a good deal of M. de Montbas, one of the

staunchest republicans in the army of the United Provinces, and the man whom the Grand Pensionary always put forward in opposition to the Prince of Orange as candidate for the post of Captain General, a position that he now, at least nominally, held.

Florent saw a dark, gloomy-featured man, stooping in the shoulders and awkward in bearing, yet with a certain elegance of manner; a man who talked in a nervous and disjointed fashion, and fidgeted with the tassels on his military gloves.

His black-and-silver uniform, with the embroidered baldric and heavy sword, sat badly on him. Florent found him neither attractive nor calculated to inspire confidence, and wondered at the Grand Pensionary's choice of a general. Glancing away, he studied M. de Witt himself.

Behind the desk where the Grand Pensionary sat hung a dark yet bright picture of fruit and flowers, and against this the brown hair and pale face of John de Witt were thrown into relief.

Pale certainly, even above his white, falling collar and black dress, but of a strength not to be mistaken and a power not to be ignored.

Florent listened to the conversation between these two with an expressionless face but inward interest, for they had begun to discuss the Prince of Orange.

"He is not at the Hague to-day," M. de Witt was saying. "M. Van Ghent is in Guelders, and His Highness wrote to me requesting permission to try some hawks and hounds sent him by the King of England—for that purpose he hath gone to Breda."

"What quarry does he hunt at Breda?" asked M. de Montbas, and it seemed to Florent that he spoke like a man afraid.

The Grand Pensionary smiled.

"What should he hunt but herons, Mynheer?—you are too suspicious."

"By Heaven! I would not have let him go."

M. de Witt turned over the reports brought him by Florent.

"He hath gone, Count, nor will he return till to-night. To-morrow I will, as you urge me, again see him on the subject of these disturbances."

"And also concerning his party in the Assembly," added Montbas, "who hamper us at every step——"

"He has no power with them."

"I do not know—they use his name——"

"And would do that whether he would or no——"

"And the Princess Amalia," interrupted M. de Montbas. "Look to her—she is ever intriguing."

"I know; yet it is to little purpose,—at heart she is afraid of us."

"But she will serve her grandson's cause—and by any means—if she have but the chance."

"I might see her also," mused M. de Witt. "I know she is timid——"

The door was opened, and M. Van Ouveualler took a few steps into the room.

"A man hath just ridden up to the Binnenhof, Mynheer, who earnestly desires to see you," said the secretary. "His name is Captain Van Haren, of the garrison at Vlaardingen."

The Grand Pensionary did not know the name.

"Nay, I cannot see him now," he answered, "his business must wait; nor should you have broken in upon us with this, Van Ouveualler."

"Mynheer," answered the secretary, colouring, "this man says he bears a letter from the Prince of Orange."

"From the Prince of Orange!" cried de Montbas, rising.

"I beseech you," breathed John de Witt, giving him a quick look; then he turned to Van Ouveualler, "Admit this Captain Van Haren."

Florent felt his pulses throbbing, his blood stirring. He advanced a little farther into the room, glancing furtively from the agitated countenance of the Count de Montbas to the composed features of John de Witt.

Captain Van Haren entered, a stout and stolid soldier, muddy and wet.

"You are unknown to me, Mynheer," said the Grand Pensionary quietly.

"I am the commander of the garrison at Vlaardingen on the Maas, Mynheer. His Highness the Prince of Orange rested there this morning—he dispatched me with this letter."

"The Prince at Vlaardingen!" cried M. de Montbas, and rapidly flushed and rapidly paled again.

For the second time the Grand Pensionary checked him with a look, holding out his hand for the letter. Without lowering his eyes to it he spoke—

"What took the Prince to Vlaardingen?"

"He was on his way to Bergen-ap-Zoom they said, Mynheer."

"He goes to Zeeland?" questioned de Witt, and his eyes narrowed.

"I think so, Mynheer."

A fierce exclamation broke from de Montbas, but John de Witt in silence tore the seals of the letter.

It was headed—

"VLAARDINGEN ON THE MAAS

"11th Sept. 1668

"MYNHEER," it ran, "as I am now arrived at an age when I can claim the heritage of my House, I am proceeding, on the invitation of Zeeland, to Middelburg, there to take my seat as premier noble of that State. Her Highness the Princess of Orange, and His Serene Highness the Elector of Brandenburg, have been pleased to declare me of age. I did not consider it necessary to request permission of Their High Mightinesses before I took this journey. Upon my return to the Hague I shall be desirous of personally conveying to you my affection and duty,

"WILLIAM, Prince of Orange"

John de Witt laid the letter down. Florent thought that his face, his whole bearing, had wonderfully changed.

"His Highness was accompanied?" he asked.

"By his household and a company of young nobles."

"He hath gone to rouse Zeeland!" cried M. de Montbas.

De Witt handed him the Prince's letter.

"You should not have allowed His Highness to leave Vlaardingen," he said sternly to Captain Van Haren. "Not he, but Their High Mightinesses are your masters."

"His Highness told me that he went to join Prince John Maurice," answered the soldier. "I did not know that it was against the wishes of Their High Mightinesses."

"Against their wishes and mine," said John de Witt. "This is an act of rebellion on the Prince's part—we have been too lenient. Get back to Vlaardingen, Captain Van Haren, and be careful how ye serve the States."

To Florent, eagerly watching, was revealed a new phase of the Grand Pensionary; he saw him moved if composed, roused and dominant. The gentleness that might have covered weakness was shown to be but the cloak of undaunted strength. He held his head high, and the prominence of his jaw was emphasised by the set of the mouth.

"Get back to Vlaardingen," he repeated; "and remember that Their High Mightinesses will endure no riots nor disturbances in the name of this most presumptuous young man."

The Captain saluted and withdrew. As the door closed on him M. de Montbas looked up from the letter fluttering in his hand.

"This is a challenge," he said.

John de Witt's brows were contracted.

"Yea, I think so."

"We have been fooled!" cried M. de Montbas bitterly; "fooled by this docile, sickly boy!" He rose and dashed the letter on to the table. "Where is your policy of concession now? What of this good citizen you were making out of a tyrant's son?"

"I have been deceived," answered the Grand Pensionary sternly. "As ye say, fooled!" His eyes expressed an anger that Florent would not have believed them capable of, so utterly did it contradict their usual look of stately kindness. "Who would have thought that there were such guile and deception in this young man!"

"I have warned you," said M. de Montbas. "He was over quiet; and never could I imagine that one of his House would be content with a subservient position."

"My eyes are opened now!" De Witt rose. "Perhaps it is better that he and I should meet without disguise. Since he hath rejected my friendship it is well that I should know it."

He drew a quick breath, and for a moment it seemed as if the old hatred fought against so long, carefully concealed and never acted upon, was asserting itself,—the hatred of the stern republican for princely insolence and tyranny; the hatred of the son of Jacob de Witt, the innocent prisoner of Loevenstein, for the son of the man who had flung him there.

M. de Montbas saw the expression, and read it by the light of his own bitter dislike to William of Orange.

"You have been acting on your principles instead of your instincts," he said. "In your heart you never trusted him."

"I have ever done him justice," answered John de Witt, "and treated him in such a manner that this act of his, this contemptuous blow in the face of my authority, is base ingratitude."

"You never loved him," insisted M. de Montbas in the same kind of trembling, nervous anger. "Though ye have had the tutoring of him, ye never loved him."

The Grand Pensionary looked straightly into the soldier's face.

"Nay, I never loved him," he said. "It was not possible."

"But you trusted him."

"It is my habit," returned M. de Witt proudly, "to trust those with whom I deal."

M. de Montbas shrugged his shoulders impatiently. To Florent's covertly observant eyes he seemed in an agitation bordering on fear.

"To join Prince John Maurice at Breda!" ejaculated the Grand Pensionary. "It is a scheme concocted with the Princess Dowager—the Prince was recently at Cleves. Who, besides, would he have with him?—Heenvliet, Renswoude, and

Boreel, I thought that I could have trusted them ; but Bromley and Van Odyk, I had intention of replacing . . . they are at the bottom of this——"

"The Prince, and no one but the Prince, is at the bottom of this !" cried M. de Montbas.

The Grand Pensionary gave a stern smile.

"You think I have been weak ; I have only acted as I considered right, and as I should act again. Maybe even yet I may by persuasion overcome this youth's worldly ambition. If not, we, the States and I, are capable of sterner measures."

"They should have been used before." M. de Montbas suppressed his impatient voice. "Where you have once been so utterly deceived, can you ever confide again? If William of Orange will do this, what will he not do?" The speaker's sallow face flushed with the energy of his feelings. "France and England, who neglected him when he was nothing in the State, begin to court him now. Why should he not revenge himself on the party that deprived him of his inheritance by intriguing for sovereign power with our enemies——"

"M. de Montbas, you go too far," interrupted the Grand Pensionary. "We have neither right nor reason to suspect the Prince of these deep designs. He is a boy, misled by his ambitions."

"This is clever work for a boy," replied the Count, with a sour smile. "He has outwitted you, Mynheer."

"That is no shame to me."

"It may be a danger to the State," was the swift answer.

"You blame me," said the Grand Pensionary quietly. "I do not doubt that, on all sides, I shall receive censure."

He moved slowly back to his desk, and M. de Montbas sprang from his chair.

"Ay! You have been wrong from the first! You cannot tame an eagle with sugar and smiles ; if you want to keep him you cage him, otherwise he will fly as soon as he is able, though he may have taken your friendliness while his wings were growing."

"I did what I would do again," repeated John de Witt firmly, and without bitterness.

He picked up the Prince's letter and looked at it again.

"The Princess and the Elector, his guardians, declare him of age—it follows he will be claiming a seat in the Council of State," he remarked.

"Zeeland will demand the restoration of the Stadtholder-ship," added M. de Montbas.

"Maybe." De Witt spoke thoughtfully. "There will be a fierce fight; perhaps I could gain the Princess, at least I will see her."

He glanced at the blue china clock on the mantelshelf.

"The Assembly is now sitting," he remarked.

"We have not yet decided the question of these riots," said M. de Montbas.

"This letter puts a different complexion on the matter." M. de Witt folded and placed it in his pocket as he spoke. "I must set the whole affair before the Assembly." He turned to the secretary, "Will you lock up those papers in my desk, Mynheer Van Mander?"

"Yes, Mynheer."

Without further speech the Grand Pensionary and M. de Montbas left the room.

Florent did as he had been directed. With a mechanical intelligence of the hands, leaving free the excited workings of his brain upon what he had just heard and the meaning of it, he put away the papers, neatly, in their various drawers.

He was about, in the same absorbed fashion, to lock the desk, when a sudden, unexpected thought held him still.

What were these papers? Without a doubt valuable to Hyacinthe St. Croix—to William of Orange.

And they lay there before him, at his mercy to read, to copy—to steal.

Prudence no longer restrained him. In the last half-hour he had decided to remain not another day in the service of M. de Witt. He had nothing to gain from the Grand Pensionary.

Yet he stood in the hazy sunlight hesitating, the key in his hand and the open desk before him.

St. Croix would pay him well, but he was not thinking of St. Croix.

What would the Prince give for the contents of the private desk of M. de Witt?

Florent did not want money—but he craved to stand for something—to be of value—to merit consideration in the eyes of this young man who had suddenly unfurled the Orange standard.

And what had he to offer but the poor services any clerk could give?

Still he hesitated; but that same recollection that filled him with hot desire to serve William of Orange held him back. Thinking of William of Orange, he could not do it.

He locked the desk and went into the outer room to give the key to M. Van den Bosch.

The clerks of M. de Witt were discussing the situation in a subdued agitation. Florent tendered the key, half defiantly.

"Are you leaving?" asked M. Bacherus, with a look of surprise on his wrinkled face.

Florent answered briefly, and took his hat and cloak down from a peg.

"What do you think of this news from Zeeland?" asked Van Ouveallier, adjusting his spectacles.

"I am sorry for M. de Witt," returned Florent dryly.

Van Ouveallier rubbed his chin.

"These are troublesome times," he remarked gloomily.

Florent left the room and the Binnenhof.

The Hague was already alive with excitement; the streets seethed with unrest. The daring of the Prince's exploit made it almost unbelievable; this and that rumour were spread and contradicted. The burgher companies were out, and by the time Florent had reached the Plaats it was announced that M. de Montbas was in council with the States, and that a message had been sent to Hellevoetsluis, where De Ruyter lay with the Fleet. These messages, intended to quiet the

people's fears of a *coup d'état* on the part of the Prince, were received with derision. There were more orange favours worn than white ones, and more satisfaction than anger expressed at the success of the Prince's enterprise.

In the Kneuterdyk Avenue, close to M. de Witt's house, Florent met St. Croix.

They exchanged hasty greeting in the crowd.

"You have heard the news?" the Frenchman smiled.

"You received the returned packet?" retorted Florent.

"Yes; the Prince is prudent to refuse to enter into negotiations that are bound to be detected."

Such was not Florent's reading of the action.

"Will you come to my lodgings to-night?" he asked. "We cannot talk here."

"To-night——? Agreed."

They parted.

Florent smiled rather grimly to himself. St. Croix would find his new prey flown, since M. de Witt's secretary had decided not to remain another hour in the Hague.

CHAPTER VI

MIDDELBURG

“CROWDS came in on all sides, the streets were nearly impassable; windows, roofs, even masts and trees, black with spectators. The Abbey was so full of people in carriages and on foot that it was hardly possible to reach the Prince’s apartments. Nor must I forget to tell Your Highness that during the two hours the Prince stood at the window the civic militia fired salutes in his honour,—and they are still sending up fireworks from the Stadhuis. His Highness reached here yesterday at three o’clock; his yacht sailed through shipping dressed with flags, and these vessels answered his salutes with a triple discharge of their guns. The Magistrates of the town had come down to the quay to receive him; the burgher companies were under arms. He entered a coach and six and was conducted to the Abbey, where the Deputies of the State came to congratulate him. The councillor pensionary made a speech to him in their name, and the different representatives of the provincial government followed his example. To-morrow His Highness is to be conducted to the Hall of Assembly. The loyalty of the people is beyond a question.

“Prince John Maurice of Nassau hath remained at Bergen-op-Zoom, under pretence of illness, fearing to compromise himself in the eyes of the Government by sharing in this dangerous enterprise; but Your Highness need have no fear, the prudence of the Prince balances his youth, and he would have reason to complain of me if I did not say that his management of this affair has shown a wisdom far beyond his years.”

Lange Jan struck, after a prelude of dancing bells, the hour of two, and Mr. Bromley laid down his pen and looked round.

His own elation and excitement had found pleasurable vent in this letter to the Princess Dowager, which he wrote, by the Prince's orders, to give some account of the reception in Middelburg. He had sat over it longer than he had thought; it was with some slight shock that he realised it to be deep into the night.

Middelburg was still at last. The crowds had departed from the courtyard of the Abbey, the bells had ceased to ring, the military salutes were hushed; the town lay silent under the September stars.

Mr. Bromley went to the small, pointed, Gothic window of his chamber and looked out.

Opposite, clear in the moonlight rose the three, pointed towers of the southern side of the Abbey; the windows projecting from the sloping roof threw distinct shadows, and the vanes on the three turrets turned slowly in the wind. Through the low-arched, dark gate, above which could be seen, carved deep in the stone, the Zeeland Lion rising from the waves, was the figure of the sentry walking up and down, the moonlight glittering on his halbert.

The courtyard was filled with trees, now almost bare of their leaves, that cast a dark tracery of shadow on the ground with their softly stirring branches.

Again the melancholy little air rang out, and Lange Jan struck a quarter past the hour. The sound was close and loud, since the Groote Kerk adjoined the Abbey wing and the tall clock-tower rose immediately behind Mr. Bromley's room, a small chamber communicating with the Prince's apartments.

These chimes, that at every quarter of an hour were ringing out over the Seven Provinces day and night, had a curious, almost uncanny meaning for the Englishman. He had never become used to them. Often, at the Hague, he would wake up to hear the chimes of the Groote Kerk, and always with a start; so loud, so insistent, yet so melancholy were these old

bells, ringing out dutifully, as their long-dead makers had bidden them, as every fifteen minutes passed.

So had they rung here in Middelburg when the Counties of Holland stepped this Abbey; so did they ring in the sunny spaces of the afternoon above a silent town; and so in the utter stillness of the night their mournful carillon played unheeding the notes of warning, of sadness, of remembrance.

Mr. Bromley took his heavy brass candlestick from the table and placed it on the mantelshelf, put away his unfinished letter, and was about to undress when a soft knock upon the door interrupted him.

He opened it. M. Heenvliet, the Prince's first gentleman-in-waiting, stood without, holding a candle. He was fully dressed.

"The Messenger from the Hague has arrived. I and M. Van Odyk were not yet abed, so saw him come up to the Abbey; M. Van Odyk thinks His Highness should see the letters now."

"From whom are they?" asked Mr. Bromley.

"The Princess and M. de Witt."

"They can wait till the morning—the Prince sleeps so ill."

"M. Van Odyk thought he should have time to consider them before he makes his speech in the Assembly to-morrow."

"Is every one else abed?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will go rouse His Highness," said Mr. Bromley reluctantly. "Will you desire M. Van Odyk to come up with the letters?"

M. Heenvliet withdrew, and Mr. Bromley crossed to the adjoining chamber, a long, low apartment that the fitful light of his single candle showed hung with tapestries and to be plainly but richly furnished.

Middelburg Abbey had been the palace of the Prince's ancestors, and still retained some of the splendour of those days.

At the farther end of this room was the door leading into

the Prince's bedroom. Mr. Bromley hesitated ; he was inclined to think the letters might have waited. William slept badly at best, and to-night must need all that he could get of rest. There was no intermediary whom Mr. Bromley might consult since the Prince had left both valet and page at the Hague, having, indeed, no excuse for taking servants on a hunting expedition.

He knocked gently and received no answer.

Lange Jan shook his chimes into the night again. There was a pause as his melody died away, then Mr. Bromley opened the door.

The candle revealed a handsome, square room with a painted, beamed ceiling, walls hung with stamped leather, and two windows, unshuttered and set open. The moonlight streamed through and lay along the polished floor.

The bed, with its plain but richly worked hangings, stood fronting the window.

On a table at the foot were a silver candlestick, a couple of small books, and a watch lying on a lace handkerchief.

Across the high-backed, wooden chair beside the bed were spread the Prince's green velvet riding-coat, his black sash, his gloves and Mechlin cravat, and hanging on the wall above his beaver with the long ostrich plume.

Another chair, set in a corner, and covered with a high Gothic canopy, held across its carved arms the Prince's sword-belt and the piled up addresses presented to him yesterday.

Mr. Bromley paused. He could hear the regular, rather laboured, breathing of the sleeper, and no other sound.

He went up to the bed, and, shading the candle, looked down.

The curtains were gathered back within their cords, and revealed the Prince lying on his side, his head raised by a pile of pillows, his hands outside the coverlet.

Any one not knowing him so well as did Mr. Bromley would have been startled by the extreme pallor of the face, which had an almost deathlike look in contrast with the tumbled auburn hair. His whole appearance was more that of one in

a swoon than in normal sleep, save that his lips were closed firmly and his fine nostrils quivered with his breathing.

"Your Highness," said Mr. Bromley, and moved his hand so that the candlelight flashed over the bed.

William gave a little sigh and opened his great eyes.

"Is that you, Bromley?"

"Yes, Sir, it is I."

The Prince sat up, in a moment alert and composed. It was wonderful how his eyes gave life and animation to his pale and frail appearance. The look of great delicacy so noticeable in his sleep seemed hardly there when his brilliant glance dominated his face.

"What is it?" he asked.

"A Messenger from the Hague, Highness, with letters."

"They could have waited till the morning," answered William fretfully.

"One is from M. de Witt."

"Still, it could have stayed. Ye need not have roused me for a message from M. de Witt."

"Another is from the Princess Dowager."

The Prince pushed the heavy hair back from his forehead.

"She is a silly old woman," he declared, "and a letter from her does not interest me at all."

Mr. Bromley, who had an unconfessed liking for the Princess, ventured to answer—

"Her Highness hath been under great anxiety as to your safety, Sir."

"Oh, pshaw!" returned William. "She hath made her peace with the Republic by now. Who suggested waking me?"

"M. Van Odyk, Highness; he is coming up. He thought you would wish to consider these letters at once."

"M. Van Odyk sometimes exceeds his duty," remarked the Prince calmly. "And nothing any one can write or say will cause me to alter my intentions. I wish you would put that candle down, Bromley, it is flickering horribly."

Mr. Bromley obeyed.

"It is caused by the open windows, Highness," he answered.
'No candle will burn straight in this draught."

"Close them," said the Prince petulantly.

Mr. Bromley again obeyed, forbearing to comment on the fact that the room was chilled with the night air, for he knew that the Prince could not sleep, or indeed hardly breathe, with the windows shut.

William leant back against the head of the bed; his lawn shirt, the sheets, pillows, and his face were turned to the same ivory hue in the candlelight.

"Why were you not abed, Bromley?" he asked.

"I was writing to the Princess, Highness."

"Did you say Prince John Maurice had stayed at Bergen-op-Zoom?"

"Yes, Highness."

"He will have told the Princess himself," remarked William.
"Being by now recovered of his sickness," he added dryly.

"Shall I see if M. Van Odyk hath returned?" asked Mr. Bromley.

"Bring him here," commanded William briefly.

The Englishman returned in the dark to his room, and reached it as M. Van Odyk appeared at the door.

"The Prince is awake and will see you—but he was not over pleased to be roused."

"The matter is important," answered M. Van Odyk.

Mr. Bromley had no more to say. William Van Odyk, rich, a connection of the House of Orange, clever, son of the man who was once the most trusted adviser of the Prince's mother, had perhaps as much of William of Orange's confidence as he ever bestowed on any one; for those placed about the Prince were not of his own choosing, he had always been too restricted to be able to find advisers or confidants. His grandmother he had never forgiven for her overtures to the republican party, and such men as he had given his rare friendship to, Cornelius Triglandt, the Lord of Zuylestein, and William Bentinck, had been removed from him by M. de Witt.

The few who had followed him to Middelburg he tolerated. He had no great trust in them, but relied on his own genius for command to make these, or any others, subservient to him.

When Mr. Bromley returned with M. Van Odyk to the Prince's chamber, they found him half dressed and seated at the table at the foot of his bed snuffing the candle.

He looked up as they entered, and smiled with his eyes.

"Bromley," he said, "I have absolutely no clothes at all—and those we begged from Prince John Maurice," he added, with a touch of humour, "are so utterly too large."

Mr. Bromley was compunctious.

"I am sorry, Highness—it was forgotten——"

"I can procure you anything you wish in the town to-morrow Highness," interrupted M. Van Odyk.

"Nay, it is no matter," answered the Prince, "only to-night I should have been grateful to the States of Zeeland for a dressing-gown. Now, where are these letters, Mynheer?"

M. Van Odyk laid them on the table, and Mr. Bromley withdrew.

The Prince picked up the letter from M. de Witt and opened it, bending closer to the candle.

William Van Odyk, Lord of Beverwaert, handsome, gay, worldly, a frivolous youth behind him and no ambitions ahead beyond the pleasure of an adventure, stood in the window embrasure and observed him curiously. So slight a boy to have thrown down this bold challenge to the power whom he regarded as a usurper, thereby destroying at a blow the policy of conciliation John de Witt had pursued so unflinchingly for eighteen years. But William of Orange had been pursuing his policy almost as long. A diplomat from his cradle, he had affected a resignation to his position that the Grand Pensionary had never doubted, and that the Lord of Beverwaert himself had been deceived in until within the last two years.

He recalled now, as he watched the Prince read his letter, with what interest he had followed William's behaviour in the hands of the republican party. How he and other partisans of

the House of Orange had had their hopes half crushed by the Prince's taciturn gravity and natural reserve, which made it impossible to guess his real designs.

He had grown up in an atmosphere of adversity, been educated in a school of distrust ; and the constant necessity he was under of concealing his passions had made him, while yet a child, an adept in dissimulation.

He had never made the slightest attempt to gain the affection or confidence of the faction always loyally supporting his House. He had neither the virtues nor the vices that are loved by the crowd ; his life was austere, his tastes sober, he was rarely seen and always silent. Van Odyk was thinking now how little he really knew of him. Twice this boy's age, and man of the world as he was, he had never drawn more from the Prince than his now almost public intention to claim the inheritance of his family.

The Lord of Beverwaert brought energy, talents, and goodwill to the cause, but little confidence. Of the mighty, almost regal, power that had once belonged to the House of Orange, nothing remained to this young man but the renown of his ancestors, and what force, courage, or strength he might find in himself.

William Van Odyk wondered, and fixed his pleasant blue eyes in such an intent fashion on the Prince that the latter looked up and glanced at him keenly.

"M. de Witt writes at length," he said, and laid the letter down.

"To what purpose does he write?" asked the Lord of Beverwaert.

William motioned to the chair on the other side of the table.

"Will you not sit, Mynheer?"

Van Odyk took his place opposite to the Prince, and the solitary candle that illuminated them both showed a striking contrast in their persons : the Lord of Beverwaert, florid, fair, his gallant good looks displayed to advantage by his handsome red uniform, his gold baldric and bullion-fringed sash,

tall, stoutly built, bearing every sign of easy, pleasant living, with eyes slightly dissipated, and a mouth a little full and soft in contour; the Prince, delicate, and even weakly, in appearance, his green coat flung on carelessly over his laced shirt, wearing riding-breeches and dusty top-boots, drooping a little as he sat with an air of weariness and gravity at variance with his years, yet conveying with every movement the charm of youth and an unconscious aristocratic grace, a precocious maturity stamped on his proud and composed features, yet showing in his brilliant eyes the fire of youthful blood and the energy of a haughty race.

He tore open the other letter, glanced over it and put it down.

"M. de Witt has seen the Princess," he said. "She is, of course, frightened——"

"For your safety, Highness?"

"For her own share in this affair; flattered too, I think, by M. de Witt's overtures. She never could resist tampering with the Republic—she has always injured me with her intrigues," he added, with feeling.

"And M. de Witt?"

"He bids me take care what I say to the States of Zeeland, warns me that he withdraws his promise with regard to the Council of State—that he will, in fact, do all in his power to prevent my election, and that since I have proved myself his enemy he cannot treat me as his friend. There is a great deal more, very worthy matter, but that is the pith of it."

He took up his grandmother's letter.

"Her Highness would keep on good terms with M. de Witt. She advises me to say as little as possible here, and to return as quietly as may be . . ."

"What do you think of this advice?" asked M. Van Odyk.

William gave him a quick, keen glance.

"Do you imagine that it could make any difference?"

"To your intentions, Highness?"

"Yes."

"I think it will not, Highness," smiled the Lord of Beverwaert.

"I shall speak in the Assembly as I intended to speak," said the Prince composedly.

"Yet it would be worth a little prudence to secure the good graces of M. de Witt."

The Prince's eyes flickered over him at this in a manner conveying that M. Van Odyk had but a small share of William's confidence or esteem.

"I have never lacked caution," he said quietly; "and you know, Mynheer, that I had to forego M. de Witt's good graces when I undertook this journey."

"I know; but now the thing is done, you can excuse yourself——"

William interrupted.

"Mynheer, what use are the good graces of M. de Witt to me?"

The Lord of Beverwaert shrugged his shoulders.

"He represents the United Provinces."

The Prince pushed back the heavy, reddish curls that gave such a marked character to his face.

"The United Provinces and I understand each other," he answered impatiently, "without the intervention of M. de Witt."

Then, seeing the look in M. Van Odyk's face, he blushed with vexation lest he had been betrayed for once into an expression too outspoken.

"I shall offend M. de Witt no further than I can help," he added, his manner instantly restrained again. He looked down at the Princess's letter that he still held.

"We will return to the Hague to-morrow, Mynheer, and I will see Her Highness before she becomes enmeshed in intrigues."

"You have not much confidence in Her Highness," remarked the Lord of Beverwaert.

"What can one expect from a woman?" returned the Prince in a tone of quiet but boundless contempt. "I thank God I can take my affairs into my own hands,"—uncontrollable annoyance clouded his face,—“but for her I had never lost Orange

—and my estates have been utterly mismanaged, it will be a month's work straightening her accounts ; the land hath been left unsold and I have as many debts as a captain of cavalry——"

He checked himself with his habitual distrust, as if he repented already of such a long speech, and rose, taking up the candle.

M. Van Odyk accepted his dismissal.

"I need not have disturbed Your Highness," he said, rising.

"It is no matter," answered the Prince, with a little cough.

Lange Jan struck, but neither noticed how his noisy chimes broke the stillness of the night, for each had heard such peals ringing out over the Seven Provinces every hour of every day and night since they could remember anything.

The Lord of Beverwaert took the candle from the Prince and opened the door.

"I forgot to tell Your Highness, a man came here—from the Hague. He desired to see you, but the crowd made it impossible. He wished to join your service. I do not think that it was a matter of any importance."

"Who was he?" asked William, holding his brow.

"One Florent Van Mander, who has been with M. de Witt."

"I remember him," said the Prince.

"I told him to return to-morrow, Highness."

"He is rather hasty in changing masters," said William, with a half malicious smile in his eyes. "I cannot pay as well as M. de Witt—yet."

"There are those would rather serve you, Highness, nevertheless."

"Thank you, Mynheer."

William held out his beautiful, aristocratic hand, and the Lord of Beverwaert kissed it.

"Good-night, Mynheer."

"Shall I send Bromley to you, Highness?"

"No—I require nothing."

But Van Odyk hesitated.

"You look very pale—I am remorseful that I disturbed you."

"Oh, as to that," the Prince gave a sudden, brilliant smile, "I have a damnable headache, which is too ordinary an affair to be remarked on, is it not? Do not rouse poor Bromley, and get to bed yourself, Mynheer."

"Shall I not leave the candle, Highness?"

"Nay, I have another. Good-night."

"Good-night, Highness."

The Prince closed the door on the Lord of Beverwaert and returned to the table at the foot of his bed.

He began to strike the flint and tinder, but a sudden cough shook him so that he had to put the box down in order to hold his head, suddenly throbbing with acute agony.

For a while he sat quiet, drawing his breath painfully, then, at a second attempt, lit the candle, and the tall flame sprang up and mingled with the moonlight.

The Prince thrust the two letters into the pocket of his coat and moved the candle away from his eyes.

Then he drew towards him the books on the table : one a black-letter Bible with silver corners and clasps, the other, *Idea or Portrait of a Christian Prince*, by Cornelius Triglandt, humbly bound in black.

William languidly opened this, then glanced at the watch beside his elbow.

It was close on four o'clock.

Resting his head in his hand, he lifted his eyes and gazed at the moonlit square of window. He could see, rising opposite against the clear sky, the turrets of the Abbey, their weather-vanes turning in the cold sea-wind, and the boughs of the elms decked scantily with their last leaves.

William glanced again at the book. It lay open at the fly-leaf that bore his arms, the lion rampant against the billets, and underneath his motto—

"Je sera Nassau, moi, je maintiendrai."

The Prince put his hand down on the page and drew a quick but instantly repressed breath.

Over the sleeping city the old clock chimed again, the little ancient melody, the jangling strokes.

William leant back in the chair. The candle cast his shadow, moving and fantastic, on the wall behind him, drew out lines of red gold in his hair and threw a faint glow over his colourless features.

It was utterly silent save for his labouring breath. M. Triglandt's book lay open beside the light that flickered over the motto engraved between fine flourishes—

"Je sera Nassau, moi, je maintiendrai."

CHAPTER VII

THE MANIFESTO

THE Prince's gentlemen and the knights and nobles of Zeeland were gathered in the council chamber of the Abbey, talking together in twos and threes.

The room was large and light, and barely furnished. On the wall facing the windows hung the famous blue-and-white tapestries, representing the Dutch victories over the Spanish; and on the wide-tiled hearth some logs were burning, for the day was raw and chilly and the trees without tossed against a grey sky.

Many of the younger men, richly dressed, were laughing, walking about impatiently, striking their riding-whips on their high boots and exchanging daring comments on M. de Witt.

It was to curb the impetuosity of these youthful nobles that the Princess Dowager had summoned the old Prince John Maurice from Cleves, thinking he would take her grandson under his protection; but seventy proving more timorous than seventeen William was left to manage alone the enthusiasm and recklessness of his followers.

In one of the window embrasures the Lord of Zuylestein stood conversing with M. Van Odyk, M. Heenvliet, the first gentleman-in-waiting, and M. Renswoude, the first equerry.

The perpetual chimes announced nine o'clock and the Prince entered accompanied by Mr. Bromley.

He saluted all of them, and advanced with an outstretched hand to M. de Zuylestein, who had once possessed his entire confidence, and though the years of separation had weakened the friendship between them, William was still gracious.

"Did you sleep well, Highness?" asked M. de Zuylestein, who only unbent his haughty manner to the Prince.

"As usual, Mynheer." He pulled his gloves from his sword-belt and slowly drew them on.

It was noticeable that he used no arts to ingratiate himself with his supporters. His manner was distant and reserved, he hardly glanced at those about him. Under his heavy black beaver his face showed composed and inscrutable.

At his entry all had fallen silent, and all, more or less openly, were observing him.

"I missed the clock." He took out his watch. "A little after nine. M. de Zuylestein, I should like to see the church."

"Will Your Highness go down now?"

"Yes."

The Prince took his whip from Mr. Bromley and stuck it in his boot.

"M. Van Odyk," he said, coughing, "tell them I will ride to the Stadhuis; I am smothered in their coach and six."

Attended by M. de Zuylestein and Mr. Bromley, and followed by several of his gentlemen, the Prince descended the narrow, polished stairs and came out into the courtyard.

It was a cloudy autumn morning, windy and cold. The brown and yellow leaves circled the tree-trunks in shivering crowds and sank fluttering from the almost bare branches. The red-brick Abbey buildings, with their blue and yellow painted shutters, the pointed towers pierced with irregular windows, rose up distinct and clearly coloured.

Directly behind them Lange Jan towered, his Gothic windows bricked up or furnished with coloured shutters, his bells visible in his leaden cupola and crowned with the weathercock. Beside the tower, just above the line of the Abbey roof, rose the majestic outline of the body of the church.

One of the Zeeland nobles explained.

"When this was the Abbey church, Highness, it was possible to reach it from the Palace, through the cloisters, but these have fallen into disuse and have been built up."

"It was a pleasant dwelling," remarked William. It seemed,

by the swift look he swept over the Abbey, as if he remembered that his ancestors, the counts of Holland, had lived in it.

They passed under the low entrance arch, and almost immediately to their right was the small side door of the church.

It was open.

William uncovered and entered.

About the door was the square, wooden railing, its gate locked during service so that the devout might not be disturbed, and the late-comers be pilloried in the public eye, forced to remain standing like sheep in a pen; now, however, the gate stood open, and William, resting his hand on it, looked round.

He was under the tower and the organ, sideways to the length of the building and facing the pulpit.

Magnificent in line and proportion, and of a noble magnitude, the great church gave an instant and chilling impression of bareness and coldness.

The Reformation had let the light into this and many another once dim and gorgeous temple of the old faith. The jewelled colours had gone from the arched windows, and clear glass took their place. Precious marbles, gold and silver vessels, tapestries and paintings had gone also, and walls and roof were whitewashed from top to bottom; in the daylight glaring in on them from the unshaded windows they gave a desolate effect of dreary immensity.

The huge pillars set in double rows were whitewashed too; in parts, on their granite bases, it had worn off and showed the stone beneath.

Monuments, saints, shrines, and carvings had been torn from the walls, and unbroken panelling of plain wood covered the places that knew them no more.

There was no altar; where it had been stood a bare and open space.

Heavy, stiff, and narrow pews filled the nave, and under the severe, high-placed pulpit the seats of the elders rose in tiers, each with a brass-clasped Bible before it out of which hung a long green marker.

William leant heavily on the gate and gazed at the spot

where, opposite to him, two monuments broke the white expanse of wall. They were the tablets in black to the memory of William, King of Holland, and his brother Floris. Above them an inscription told how the latter had died, and been buried here in Middelburg 1256. The King's tablet bore a simple carving of a mantle, a wreath with a sword through it, a crowned helmet—a globe.

In the niche above the name of Floris were helmet, mantle, and sword only.

William did not even glance at the only other monument the church contained, that to the brothers Van Evertzen, which was still in course of erection. The staunch republican heroes had not so much interest for the young Prince as the simple record of these long-dead rulers of Holland.

He stood so still the gentlemen behind him thought that he must be praying. They could not see his face, only his slight figure leaning against the railing, the bright hair on his shoulders and his slack hand holding the beaver whose drooping plume touched the ground.

Suddenly he turned, and there was a faint colour in his face.

"You have a fine church, Mynheer," he addressed the Zeeland nobleman in a low voice. "I should wish to be here on Sunday."

They passed out of the cold light of the church into the sunless grey of the morning air. M. Van Odyk came to meet them.

The Deputies were waiting to conduct His Highness to the Stadhuis. His Highness did not hurry himself for this, but came leisurely across the courtyard.

Among those waiting round the Abbey door was one he recognised.

He stopped.

"M. Van Mander," he said.

Florent coloured hotly. Those standing near fell back as the Prince spoke.

"I have come to join Your Highness' service," said Van Mander awkwardly.

The Prince's compelling eyes fixed themselves on him with a look of power, of daring and mastery, of half-smiling self-confidence that made the blood of the man who caught it leap as if in answer to some rousing summons.

"You may stay if you will," was all William said as he passed into the Abbey.

Florent Van Mander flushed with pleasure. His poor offer was at least not refused; yet he asked himself why he was so elated at changing from the employ of M. de Witt to the service of a pretender embarked on a difficult enterprise? He did not know—but he did know that he would rather be a foot-boy in the Prince's train than confidential clerk to M. de Witt, and that that one glance from William was more to him than all the Grand Pensionary's gentle goodness.

The courtyard filled with people on horseback and on foot. Most of them wore orange ribbons in their coats, and most took off their hats when the Prince came out of the Abbey attended by the burgher councillors in their robes and chains of office.

William preceded them, covered, as Florent was quick to remark, and with the same ceremony as if he already held his father's offices. He mounted the black horse, waiting for him, and from the saddle looked round the crowded courtyard.

He was already one of the finest riders in the Netherlands, graceful and fearless, and able to manage the fiercest horse after a fashion strange in one of his frail appearance. This was no valueless asset in the eyes of men such as M. de Zuytlestein, who regretted the delicate health and reserved demeanour of one who must rely on popularity for his advancement.

His fine horsemanship was the one showy thing about the Prince, and on the rare occasions when he had displayed himself to the people it had not failed of its effect.

Mr. Bromley, adding later to his letter to Her Highness the impetuous, intriguing Princess Dowager, had great things to say of the Prince's progress to the Stadhuis that morning.

"He rode through the streets with his hat in his hand," wrote the Englishman, "smiling a little, this way and that—all the maids must wear orange ribbons, and all the men look out their swords. Zeeland at least is tired of M. de Witt—'We want a soldier, a Prince,' I hear on all sides; they go mad for him. M. de Zuylestein feared that he was not open enough with the people, but it is not necessary for His Highness to make himself beloved, since he is so already, and his demeanour hath pleased every one. I had not believed this city to be so large and prosperous until I saw the crowds of well-dressed people filling the streets, the windows, and the roofs——"

Here, however, Mr. Bromley's information came to a stop, for the Prince's suite remained outside the council chamber, only M. de Zuylestein and M. Van Odyk entering with him.

The representatives of the six towns and the nobles of Zeeland were assembled to meet him; at his entry they rose as one man.

For a breath or two William remained in the doorway, gazing at them, as if hesitating what to do.

The chamber was low and hushed, not very large; the walls of stone, the ceiling of heavy dark wood; the diamond-paned window opposite the door looked on to the street, and bore in the centre of each lozenge the Lion of Zeeland, rising rampant from the waves.

A fire burnt on the blue-and-white tiled hearth, and in the centre of the room was placed the large table, covered with a plain green cloth, about which the Deputies sat.

At the desks in the window recesses were placed a couple of clerks, their ink-horns, quills, and folios before them. The sole colour and brightness in the whole chamber was the effect of the chains of gold worn over the sombre gowns and white collars of the Councillors.

At the head of the table stood a velvet arm-chair. The Deputies, who had conducted the Prince, requested him to seat himself there and assume the presidency of the assembly.

Each member took then his own place.

William sat down, covered, and began to pull off his gloves, loosening the fingers slowly, one by one, his eyes cast down.

He was younger by twenty years than the youngest there, and despite his gravity looked but the boy he was in contrast with the weighty men about him. M. de Zuylestein, glancing at him, felt his heart sink; too much had been thrust on to the shoulders of seventeen. He looked across the table at M. Van Odyk and in his eyes saw the same uneasiness.

The Deputy of the city of Middelburg rose in his place and turned towards the Prince.

He was a grey-haired man, pompous and self-important.

His even, official voice fell on a contained stillness. He offered the presidency of this meeting to the Prince of Orange; thanked him for coming to Middelburg in person to accept the dignity of premier noble of Zeeland, which, the speaker reminded him, was his by right as well as by the will of the people; professed the greatest loyalty to his interests, and ended with an only half-veiled allusion to Zeeland's readiness to go yet further lengths on his behalf.

He sat down.

There was a pause; every one was looking at the Prince. M. de Zuylestein felt uneasy. He knew how much William had dared to be there, and what this enterprise meant to him, and the youth's perfect self-control seemed to him unnatural. He did not know what this boy was going to say, he feared both that it might be too bold and not bold enough.

William laid his tasselled gloves on the table and rose.

It seemed as if the hushed assembly became yet more utterly still.

The Prince's face was shaded by his hat, but M. Van Odyk, a sympathetic observer, saw it was nearly as colourless as the lace round his throat. He rested his hand on the arm of the chair, and the light was caught in his square green ring and in the silver buttons on his cuff.

M. de Zuylestein leant back. He could not but feel anxious.

This was the first time that the Prince had in any way expressed his opinions, or in any way spoken in public ; it was the first hint of his own attitude as yet given to his partisans.

He had neither paper nor note to help him. Even M. Van Odyk had no idea what he was going to say.

With his low, slow utterance William began, fixing his brilliant eyes on the faces of the Councillors of Zeeland.

"I thank you for your speech, Mynheer Van Huybert, and you for your loyalty, my lords and gentlemen of Zeeland, a loyalty which you have maintained towards me since the day of my birth, and which no evil example nor evil fortune has caused to falter. You have done more to-day than honour me within the limits of your own State—you have had the courage to give the signal that the United Provinces await."

He paused, as if to let the open daring of his last sentence have its full effect.

With the effort of speaking his pallor had disappeared under a faint blush ; he was breathing a trifle heavily.

"If I had delayed taking possession of my office, I should have considered myself lacking in respect to your wishes. It is not in my nature to consider obstacles nor to wait on circumstance ; I consider that the time has come for me to follow in the footsteps of my ancestors."

He paused again and took off his hat, so that the light, streaming in through the windows at his left, fell full upon his face. His princely features, framed in the bright waves of his heavy hair, flushed deeper with the emotion shining in his intense eyes.

"I shall never forget the honour that you have done me to-day. I do not think that you will find me unworthy of the confidence of Zeeland.

"I look about me on perilous times ; I see that there is much to do for the preservation of the United Provinces and the Reformed Religion. But it has never been the habit of my House to find any sacrifice too great in the service of God, and to whatever duty He be pleased to call me I shall be faithful."

His glance flashed from one face to another ; suddenly he smiled.

“Gentlemen, you know the motto of my House—‘I will maintain.’”

He put on his hat and sat down.

The speech was a manifesto. An old statesman could have framed nothing that could have pleased the people better. M. Van Odyk, relieved and satisfied, pictured the effect of His Highness’ words, printed by the thousand and scattered up and down the country.

The silence seemed to thrill and gather. The Deputies moved, looked at each other, nodded and smiled with narrowed eyes ; hidden excitement flushed every face.

The burgomaster of Middelburg, M. Van Huybert, again rose.

“In the name of Zeeland we thank Your Highness.”

Behind the words was more than any words or any action could express,—deep loyalty to the ancient House, blind enthusiasm for the ancient glories, unquestioning belief in the descendant of the man who had given the Netherlands their freedom.

William saluted them, recommended the Lord of Beverwaert to their notice as his deputy, and left the chamber.

When his suite had reached the Markt, and William was remounted, his gentlemen crowded about him with congratulations.

The men and women who had come from all parts of the Island to see him, dressed in their neat native costume, black with the gold and coral ornaments ; the burgher companies on horseback, the pikemen on foot, the shopkeepers in their best, pressed round the cavalcade, almost impeding its progress in their eagerness to catch sight of William of Orange.

William glanced back at the stately Stadhuis, with its statues of the Counts of Holland and their ladies, under the delicate carved canopies, standing between each window ; at the pointed roof pierced with little gabled windows behind blue shutters, painted with white in the shape of a curtain drawn to a waist ;

at the Gothic tower with its leaden dome and clock,—it seemed as if he would fix the place on his mind.

A pale beam of sun broke through the clouds and rested on the building.

"It is done," said the Lord of Beverwaert in easy elation.

William of Orange gathered up his reins and turned his horse in the direction of the Abbey of St. Nicolas.

"Mynheer, it is begun," he answered.

CHAPTER VIII

M. DE WITT AND HIS HIGHNESS

"**W**HERE is the Prince now?" asked Cornelius de Witt.

"At Honsholredyck, once his mother's house. He will not return directly to the Hague for fear of my authority."

The Grand Pensionary stood at the window of his residence in the Kneuterdyk Avenue and looked, as he spoke, out at the colourless afternoon.

"But this will bring him," replied the Ruard grimly. He referred to the skilful measure his brother had taken. On receiving the news from Zeeland, the Grand Pensionary had forced the Assembly to pass a law forbidding individual provinces to reinstate the Stadtholdership without the sanction of the other States, and confirming M. de Montbas in his appointment as Captain General.

"Maybe. He hath discovered a stubborn disposition that makes it difficult to know what he will do. He hath sent his valet to Professor Bornius and M. de Chapuygeau, dispensing with their services."

"This is impudence," frowned Cornelius. "He hath no right to dismiss his tutors when he is under your guardianship."

"He had no right to go to Zeeland," returned John de Witt, moving from the window; "nor any right to deceive me with intent to rouse dissension in the State,—but since he had the will and the power, what avails our talk of right?"

Cornelius leant forward from his high-backed chair and stared thoughtfully into the fire.

The pleasant glow of the burning logs played over his blunt-featured, well-looking face, his handsome grey silk dress, braided in gold, his embroidered baldric, his high boots and massive sword-hilt. He was a large and weighty man, of a demeanour more passionate and impatient than his brother.

"You must remember I always distrusted this pupil of yours," he said slowly. "Have we not had enough difficulty, at home and abroad, that you must nurse this viper to sting you on your own hearth?"

John de Witt moved to the other side of the fireplace.

"He is very young."

The Ruard glanced up.

"Ah, still you make excuses for him."

"I endeavour to be just, brother," answered the Grand Pensionary. "This young man hath fooled me, I confess it. I have done all in my power to prevent this mistake of mine proving of danger to the State——"

"Do not imagine that I reproach you," put in Cornelius quickly.

His brother faintly smiled.

"It may be that I wish to justify myself . . . a statesman should not be so easily deceived—and by a child. I thought I could rely on those I had placed about him. I did not know he was in communication with M. de Zuylestein."

"All which shows that he is cleverer than we. Why do you speak of his youth, since he has belied it with his wisdom?" asked Cornelius warmly.

"I thought not of wisdom or cleverness," replied the Grand Pensionary, half mournfully, "but of what his character might be; what honour, strength, or nobility he may possess. I have taken some pains with his teaching, he hath been educated as a Christian, a Dutchman, a gentleman; I cannot believe my labour has been in vain—not utterly."

"He seeks his father's power, and less will not satisfy him," said the Ruard. "And as every magistrate in Holland hath sworn to the Perpetual Edict of the abdication of his House, what is there before us if he grows in strength?"

"His hopes cannot be so presumptuous," answered John de Witt sternly. "If they are we must check them. I have regained the Princess Dowager, through her fears and her vanity."

"She hath no influence with him. He owns no counsellor but his pride—he attended the review of the troops at Breda——"

"Against my will."

"He went to flaunt us."

"Still, at the officers' banquet they placed him below M. de Montbas, and he would not take his seat nor call upon M. de Montbas; so his ambition brings humiliation on him. We gained by that show of firmness."

"No concessions," said the Ruard, "no concessions. His party become incredibly bold; we have been driven to order out the train-bands at Dordt to check the mob."

"It is a marvellous thing that they should clamour for him," mused John de Witt, turning his dark, sad eyes on his brother. "What can they know of him that they should love him so?"

"The base crowd care not about his qualities," replied the Ruard, "they but seek an excuse for disorder and lawlessness. Did you hear Vivien in the Assembly to-day?"

"No."

Cornelius de Witt laughed angrily.

"He was cutting a book with a steel knife. I, sitting next him, asked what he was about. 'Trying the effect of steel on parchment,' he said—meaning that once there was a sword in the Prince of Orange's hand there would be an end of the Perpetual Edict."

John de Witt was silent, and his brother rose.

"If I am to return to Dordt to-night I must take my leave."

The Grand Pensionary roused himself from absorbed thoughts; he asked after his brother's wife and his own children.

"Do you see them often?"

"Almost every day."

"I have put a Bible for Agneta in your portmantle—it is large print that she may read it while at her spinning-wheel."

"She is a good girl."

A radiant look came into John de Witt's eyes.

"I can hardly bring myself to do without such precious company, but they are better with my sister. This house is too quiet, and I so seldom here."

Both were silent, thinking of Wendela de Witt. Regrets were not in their religion; believing, they could not repine.

The firelight, showing more strongly as the grey day faded, warmed the sombre, dark room into a more cheerful aspect, glittering redly in the brass fireirons and bellows, the nails in the leather chairs, the Ruard's embroidered dress and sword-hilt; showing, too, the Grand Pensionary's tall and stately figure in his quiet black with the plain linen collar tied with silk tassels, and the brown hair falling either side the melancholy, composed face.

There was a great likeness between the two brothers, though Cornelius was of a larger make, a freer carriage, haughtier perhaps and more fiery, but with a glance as dignified and a bearing as noble.

"Since you must go——" John de Witt was saying, when Van Ouveualler opened the door.

"Mynheer, His Highness the Prince of Orange."

The brothers exchanged a quick glance.

"He is here?"

"In the library, Mynheer."

"Alone?"

"He rode up with one of his gentlemen, Mynheer, who remains with the horses."

John de Witt laid his hand on his brother's sleeve.

"Desire the Prince to come in here if he wishes to see me, Van Ouveualler."

When the secretary had gone, the Ruard spoke.

"You did not know he was at the Hague?"

"No; he must have ridden from Honsholredyck to-day."

"What does this move mean?"

The Grand Pensionary's lips were sternly set, his brows slightly frowning.

"I do not know, Cornelius."

"He hath heard of what passed in the Assembly yesterday."

"Will you stay?"

"Nay, he would not speak before me—we never loved one another."

"He must speak before whomsoever I choose to question him since he is still under my tutelage," answered John de Witt sternly.

"Yet I will not remain, lest your patience and his presumption should anger me."

M. Van Ouveallier entered again, announcing the Prince, who followed him.

The secretary withdrew, closing the door, and William of Orange stood facing the brothers. He was in riding costume, and wore over it a dark velvet mantle. His whip was in his boot, he carried his gloves and his hat in his right hand, purposely to cover the fact that he did not offer it to M. de Witt.

There was a colour in his face, and his bright hair was tumbled over his falling lace collar. He had ridden a long way in a keen wind.

"I am glad that Your Highness hath seen fit to return to the Hague," said M. de Witt. He also did not offer his hand.

"I was ill at Honsholredyck, Mynheer," answered William. "Good day, Mynheer the Ruard." And he fixed his eyes with a daring expression of haughty dislike on Cornelius de Witt. He knew perfectly well that in the Grand Pensionary's brother there was a staunch and fearless republican, an enemy of his House, with distrust of him far keener than John de Witt's; but more than this, William disliked the Ruard because he felt in him some one who read him better than any other man. Had Cornelius been in his brother's place, William would never have escaped to Middelburg.

The Ruard returned the Prince's salute very coldly.

"I hope Your Highness hath recovered your health sufficiently to enable you to resume your duties."

"What are my duties?" asked William, looking at him

under drooping lids. "I thought it was my misfortune to have none, Mynheer."

"Your duties are your studies," replied Cornelius sternly, "and obedience to M. de Witt."

The Prince slightly smiled; his glance flickered from one man to the other. John de Witt not at all, and Cornelius only partially, guessed at the implacable resentment hidden behind his impassive exterior, and neither knew that the Ruard's remark was one more added to those things the Prince would never forgive.

"It is with M. de Witt I wish to speak," he said.

"I shall not disturb Your Highness."

But John de Witt interposed.

"My brother is in the entire confidence of the States, Highness, and you may say what you have come to say before him."

"Mynheer the Ruard may be in your confidence, M. de Witt," replied William, still with a slight smile, "but he is not in mine."

Cornelius took up his plumed hat and bowed proudly to the Prince.

"Good day, Your Highness. Good day, brother."

William gave him as careless a salute as he dared and turned his back as the Ruard closed the door.

John de Witt's just indignation was not softened by this haughtiness.

"What is the object of this visit?" he demanded. "After keeping me entirely ignorant of your movements, why do you come to my house in this informal way?"

They both remained standing; the Prince with his hand resting on the little oak table beside him.

"I wrote to you, Mynheer, from Vlaardingen, to tell you that the Princess and the Elector had declared me of age—they have notified this to the Assembly." William spoke quietly, looking down. "Therefore I do not consider it necessary to give an account of my actions to any one."

"Neither the Princess nor the Elector are your guardians,

but the States," replied the Grand Pensionary sternly. "And Their High Mightinesses have fixed your majority in another four years ; until then, I, representing them, am responsible for your education and your behaviour. It seems, Highness, that you will make my task difficult."

William moved to the fire and seated himself in the chair the Ruard had occupied. It was not lost on M. de Witt that he did so easily, without invitation, as if in his own house.

"By going to Middelburg you have placed yourself at the head of the Malcontents," continued M. de Witt, "and taken upon yourself the dangerous and troublesome part of a pretender."

"Nay, Mynheer," William glanced up, "I pretend to nothing ; I went to Middelburg to enter upon an office mine by right."

"You had not the sanction of the State."

"Mynheer—I was within the law—the law of the Republic," answered the Prince. "The State of Zeeland invited me, and I saw no reason to refuse. If Their High Mightinesses consider Zeeland did amiss—it is a matter for the Assembly."

The Grand Pensionary seated himself the other side of the hearth and fixed his deep eyes on the Prince's composed face.

"You did a daring thing, an ill-considered thing, and, I think, a dishonourable thing," he said.

William blushed hotly at that last epithet, and for once the effort at control showed. He was silent because he did not trust himself to speak.

"I put before you," continued John de Witt, "the state of the country. I asked you to dissociate yourself from the faction that used your name. You evaded my frankness, you deceived my trust ; while you assumed docility you were planning to raise the standard of revolt. While I was teaching you your duty to God and your country you were secretly nursing selfish, ambitious, and dangerous designs. In a word," he made a disdainful gesture with his hand, "you deceived me."

The Prince made a movement that tossed his violet mantle back from his shoulders.

"I have never given you my word on any matter on which I have broken it," he said in a low voice, "nor used fair speeches. My behaviour has been what you might have looked for from a State prisoner. I have said I am grateful to you for your care, M. de Witt ; I repeat it, you have my duty and my friendship."

"What duty or friendship was it that played this stroke?" asked the Grand Pensionary.

William raised his brilliant eyes.

"I was within the law, Mynheer. That I went to claim my father's private titles has nothing to do with affairs of State."

"Your visit had a political complexion."

"Who has so represented it to you? Any lord visiting his fief would receive the welcome Zeeland gave me. I could not imagine that the friendliness of people long devoted to my House could cause uneasiness to the Government."

Their eyes met, but nothing was expressed in William's steady glance that M. de Witt could read his words by.

"Not uneasiness to the Government, Highness," answered the Grand Pensionary quietly, "for that is strong enough to quell whatever dissatisfaction your action may have raised, but uneasiness to me, who have your welfare at heart. I had hoped to accomplish as your friend what I may now have to perform as your adversary."

The Prince looked into the fire. The lace on his breast was rising and falling quickly with his breathing, and his reddish, arched brows were raised slightly. John de Witt marvelled in his heart at this youth's control ; he was a little baffled by it. His desire was to take William's manner for sincerity ; experience, and the counsels of Cornelius, warned him that it might very well be diplomacy. Himself, he was using the one weapon he had used all his life, a noble, simple honesty of purpose and of speech.

"You have heard what has taken place in the Assembly?" he asked.

"Yes, Mynheer." William drew out his laced handkerchief and pressed it to his lips. "It is concerning the measures lately passed in the Assembly that I wished to speak to you."

"They could not please you," said M. de Witt, half mournfully; "but you forced me."

The Prince coughed.

"It seems you think me dangerous, Mynheer?"

John de Witt answered him directly—

"I think the position you might assume would be dangerous."

William lifted suddenly smiling eyes.

"Were not my hopes of dominion effectually foiled by the Perpetual Edict, Mynheer, that you needed other laws to strengthen your power?"

"Not my power," replied M. de Witt, "but the safety of the Republic."

William pushed back the hair from his low forehead.

"Ah, you credit me with ambitions—am I not sufficiently helpless? Do you think I should intrigue for the mastery of the Seven Provinces, I—who am heir to nothing?" He gave a little smile, half bitter. "You need not have taken these precautions, M. de Witt."

"Of what does Your Highness complain?" asked the Grand Pensionary.

William answered with a flash of repressed feeling—

"Their High Mightinesses engaged to give me the Captain Generalship when I came of age . . . and it has been placed in the hands of M. de Montbas."

"You are not yet of age, Highness—youth and inexperience must wait and learn. M. de Montbas is a good soldier, and the States have confidence in him."

The Prince's hand closed tightly on the arm of his chair.

"And I had your promise, Mynheer, to obtain for me a seat in the Council of State, yet I hear you oppose my election——"

"By your action in Middelburg you have forfeited my favour in this matter," replied M. de Witt. "And I am sorry."

William bit his lip.

"You have seen the Princess Dowager," he said.

"And won her to my views for you."

"What are your—views, Mynheer?"

"I have told Her Highness that the States will not be forced. By premature intrigues you merely endanger the goodwill of the Republic, on which rest all your hopes."

The Prince gave him a keen look.

"So—you will oppose me in the Assembly?" he asked, rather breathlessly.

"I shall oppose your election into the Council of State, Highness—at least till you are of age."

"And your reason, Mynheer?"

"My reason," replied the Grand Pensionary gravely, "is that I am the servant of this Republic and sworn to maintain it in its integrity, therefore I cannot put so much power into the hands of one who has nothing save his birth as a qualification. I am not blind to your abilities, Highness, but you are too young, and have just given proof you may be too ambitious."

William made a little movement in his chair.

"And the Captain Generalship?" he asked.

"On that point the States are adamant, it remains in the hands of M. de Montbas—until you are of age at least."

There was a second's pause while William strove to contain himself, when he spoke it was in a low voice—

"I am sorry to have incurred your enmity, Mynheer."

"Not my enmity," returned M. de Witt, with feeling; "there you mistake me, Highness."

"You yourself assure me of your opposition to my claims," said the Prince. "You yourself tell me that you have withdrawn your promise in the matter of the Council of State."

"And I have told you why: because I uphold this Republic, because I must serve what I have sworn to serve, because I cannot, on my conscience, sacrifice the liberty of many to the aggrandisement of one—because I am opposed to princely power. But this does not leave me, Highness, the less your friend."

William was silent.

The shadows had so encroached on them that they could hardly see each other. M. de Witt himself lit the candles and placed them on the mantelshelf, where they were reflected in the tortoiseshell-framed mirror.

As the steady light filled the chamber the Grand Pensionary looked down at the Prince.

"Do you not understand," he said, "my position, what I must, and what I shall do?"

"I understand," answered William, "what I can not do, Mynheer."

"I have angered you, Highness." John de Witt spoke gently. "It is against my will—I would serve you any way I could—I would forget the unruly spirit you have shown. Is it not possible there might yet be confidence between us?"

The Prince replied as abruptly as irrelevantly—

"Mynheer, was it by your commands I was slighted at Breda?"

John de Witt's face hardened.

"I know of no slight, Highness. It was you who treated the officers with contempt when you refused to sit down to table with them."

"By your desire I was placed below M. de Montbas?"

"Yes, by my desire," answered M. de Witt firmly. "Why do you refer to this incident, Highness? It was against my wish that you went to the camp, and in the matter of the banquet you behaved foolishly."

"There was no gentleman there, as there is no gentleman in the United Provinces, above me in rank," said the Prince, and a barely contained pride was in his eyes and voice.

"M. de Montbas is above you as the representative of the Republic and the head of the Army, Highness."

Again William bit his lip. With the effort of keeping back the passion in his soul he flushed and quivered, fixing his eyes, that he knew often betrayed him, on the fire.

"Very well, Mynheer, I shall remember your wish, or the desire of the law, whichever I must call it."

At the slightest touch of submission John de Witt always softened instantly.

He crossed the hearth, came behind William's chair and laid his hand affectionately on the youth's shoulder.

"It is difficult to be a prince in a Republic. You have, in many ways, a hard heritage; believe me, I have always understood it. We owe your House too much . . . of all things I detest ingratitude. . . . I have seen nobility in you, too. You will be worthy of your name."

The Prince, whose perfect insight and tact had already assured him that he would obtain no concessions from the Grand Pensionary, controlled himself to a soft answer.

"This further puts me in your debt, M. de Witt," he said, and rose, holding the mantle on his breast. "You will not find *me* ungrateful . . . if I have troubled you . . . you must forgive me."

This graceful surrender surprised and touched M. de Witt.

"Indeed I have been ill," continued William, "or I had written to you—but since I could not with my own hand, I was loath to send you a letter by a clerk."

"I am sorry for your ill health," said M. de Witt sincerely, "and glad that you are reasonable."

"I trust you will never find me otherwise, Mynheer."

All trace of ill-humour had vanished from the Prince's manner. He could, when he chose, be charming; very few could resist him when he unbent, certainly not John de Witt.

"We will take up our interrupted studies, Highness, and I will overlook an indiscretion, as you must overlook some necessary harshness," he smiled.

"Do not recall M. Bornius and M. de Chapuygeau," pleaded William frankly. "Mynheer, I know all they can teach me. M. Huggens, M. Van Ghent, and yourself are sufficient tutors for me,—nay, you will do me this favour, not to put over me men whom I dislike."

John de Witt was still smiling.

"You had no right to dismiss them, Highness, but to show my goodwill I shall obtain this favour for you."

"I am greatly obliged to you, Mynheer."

William was thanking him, flattering him, with his marvellous eyes, his low voice and grateful carriage.

"Will you honour me with a visit to-morrow, Mynheer?" he asked, with an air of courteous outspokenness that sat charmingly on his youth. "I have left M. Van Odyk in Middelburg to exercise those duties that will be mine when I am out of tutelage—for the rest, I beg you will forgive them."

"Highness," answered John de Witt, gravely and sweetly, "it is my mind ever to spend as little time as possible in looking backwards, it will be my very great happiness to forget everything save your good qualities, and to work side by side with you in the future."

William fixed his smiling eyes on the Grand Pensionary's face and held out his hand—

"Thank you, Mynheer, my actions shall show me not ungrateful."

M. de Witt clasped the frail fingers warmly.

"Mr. Bromley will be tired of waiting," said the Prince, "and I fear I have already trespassed on your kindness."

He picked up his hat and gloves from the chair by the fire.

"Until to-morrow, Mynheer."

The Grand Pensionary came to the door with him. The lamps were lit in the Kneuterdyk Avenue, and the invariable autumn mists were blowing coldly from the sea.

"There will be skating soon," said William, with a little shiver.

Mr. Bromley, walking the horses up and down, stopped before the house at sight of his master.

"Good-night, Highness."

"Good-night, M. de Witt ; and again, thank you."

The Grand Pensionary closed the door, and the Prince descended the steps. As he turned his back on M. de Witt's house his eyes narrowed as if he looked at something a long way off.

"Well, Your Highness?" asked Mr. Bromley, who was rather cold but still good-humoured.

William mounted without touching the stirrup, and gathered up the reins.

"He is iron," he said; "I could not do anything nor even attempt it. How much longer?" he added in a sombre passion, "how much longer?"

They trotted the horses briskly through the cobbled streets.

"M. de Chapuygeau and M. Bornius are not coming back; I have at least two masters the less," remarked the Prince, with a gloomy satisfaction.

"I am glad, Highness," answered Mr. Bromley, who hated these two. "And M. Van Ghent?"

"He stays—I could not speak against him."

"Did M. de Witt mention his secretary who came to join you at Middelburg?"

"No. I cannot keep him in my service, Bromley—yet he might be useful," added the Prince, with the statesman's dislike to waste good material. "Well, we will talk of it to M. de Zuylestein."

He lapsed into silence, but as they passed the Stadhuis Mr. Bromley roused him.

"Then you are still on bad terms with M. de Witt?" he suggested; wondering what this interview had amounted to, and whether the Prince's cause had been advanced or no by this flight to Middelburg and its results.

"I am very good friends with M. de Witt," answered William grimly, from out the depths of his riding-cloak collar, "and he hath forgiven me. But I had to fawn on him—fawn on him, Bromley! . . . It is a thing not to be forgotten."

CHAPTER IX

AMALIA OF SOLMS

HER Highness the Dowager Princess of Orange coloured with pleasure, hastily put aside the letter she was writing, and went down to the chamber where, as she had just been told, her grandson awaited her.

It was a pouring wet day, and she had not been able to leave her elegant little residence to go into the garden which was, even at this time of the year, her delight. This had added to the weariness and monotony of her ordinary quiet life, and made the rare favour of a voluntary visit from the Prince, the only member of her family left her, and the person that she held dearest in the world, the more grateful.

The Princess was still comely, vivacious, and bright as when Prince Frederick Henry had married her, forty years ago. She was dressed with a richness and surrounded with a comfort that her straitened means made a marvel. To prevent economy from becoming meanness, and to keep luxury this side of extravagance, were her constant, almost her only, employments.

She opened the door softly and gazed at the Prince before he saw her.

The room looked on the front of the house, and was sumptuously furnished, with Persian carpets, Chinese cabinets, porcelain ornaments, carved settees and chairs, gilt and richly cushioned with stamped leather and satin.

Near the dark red silk window-curtains hung a brightly coloured parrot in an ebony ring, in front of the fire slept a

white cat, on a chair near were a tambour frame and a basket of silks.

There was only one picture, a half-length portrait of William II., in armour, holding his helmet; this hung above the mantel-piece.

Cut deep into the heavy oak frame showed the motto of the house of Nassau.—

"Je sera Nassau, moi, je maintiendrai."

Standing by the delicate-hued harpsichord that filled one corner of the room, the Prince waited. He held his whip in his hand and was frowning thoughtfully.

The Princess stepped into the chamber and closed the door with a little sound that made him turn.

"Ah, Madame, I disturb you——"

"Disturb me!" she interrupted, smiling, "it is good of you to come and see a lonely old woman."

He came forward and would have saluted her hand, but she caught him by the shoulders and kissed him on the brow—a caress he did her the honour of enduring in silence.

"How cold you are!" she exclaimed. "Have you ridden here in this rain?"

It had been pouring all day; the question seemed to William too foolish to answer.

"And on horseback!" cried the Princess, catching sight of his whip, and wet mantle over a chair.

"You know I cannot endure a carriage, Madame."

The Princess rang the little silver bell on her work-table.

"It is very imprudent, my dear—allow old age its liberty in saying so—you need a woman to look after you. These men would let you kill yourself and never notice it. Come to the fire," she finished, with a pretty air of command.

William obeyed, coughing a little, which caused her to raise still further her brows and shake her head.

A servant made his appearance.

"Remove His Highness' mantle and dry it—and—whom have you brought with you, William?"

"Mr. Bromley and a groom."

"See His Highness' gentleman is made comfortable, and let the horses be looked to," said the Princess.

The man bowed low as he withdrew. The subtle air of a Court still clung round Amalia of Solms; in her own house, at least, she was treated as a sovereign Princess. William respected her for that. He found the atmosphere of her pleasant residence congenial; it was the nearest approach to home that he had ever known, and, compared with his dreary Palace at the Hague, ease, luxury, and comfort combined.

The Princess settled herself in her chair.

"I have not seen you since your visit to Middelburg. Come nearer the fire; sit down and tell me all that happened."

She was a handsome old lady; had been of the pretty, imperious style of beauty, dark and flashing. As she leant back on her cushions now, in her yellow silk gown, with her brown eyes under her white hair and the fine lace round her head and fastened under her chin, she was a beauty still.

"You know what occurred at Middelburg, Madame," answered William, not very warmly.

"I have had reports—letters from Mr. Bromley, to whom I am eternally grateful!—but from you nothing!"

William leant on the arm of his chair, coughed, and pushed back his curls.

His expression told the Princess that he was displeased with her. She had half expected it. Certainly she had helped concoct her grandson's journey to Middelburg, but she had immediately thereafter been frightened and had allowed herself easily to be won by M. de Witt again to prudence—and William knew it.

Unfurling a black and glittering fan, she held it between her face and the fire, while she gave her grandson an anxious glance.

"You are angry with me, William," she said plaintively. "You only came to see me because you wanted to scold me."

The Prince still looked into the fire.

"Ah, me," sighed Amalia of Solms, "I can never please you. You have no more devoted friend than I, and you do not repay me with the least regard or affection."

The Prince answered now, in his soft voice and slow utterance—

"These reproaches, Madame, are foolish—it is I who have the grievance. Had you stood firm once I found myself in Middelburg I should find myself in a different position now."

The Princess sat up with a helpless, appealing gesture, clasping her white hands over her heart.

"I did all I could—I solemnly notified to the Assembly that I had declared you of age—I wrote to Prince John Maurice begging him to join you——"

"He had not the courage to respond further than Bergen-op-Zoom," interrupted William dryly.

"I know—it was not my fault—I thought that he would be a valuable ally for you——"

Again the Prince broke in—

"I think of M. de Witt, Madame—he came to you?"

"The moment he learned you were at Middelburg," answered the Princess, with a shiver.

"What to find out or say?"

"I do not know," the fan fluttered nervously. "It was dreadful——"

"And you were frightened—you made concessions."

"Not one, my dear, not one!"

"M. de Witt warned you we were going too far." William turned on her his masterful eyes.

"He was angry, of course," said the Princess evasively.

"He told you my action had imperilled those favours already promised me—in a word, he threatened you."

"Maybe he did—he was certainly angry," repeated the Princess.

"And you gave way, Madame."

"Not an inch!"

William smiled rather bitterly.

"I wish I could believe it——"

"Indeed, it is the truth."

"It is the truth, Madame," asserted the Prince impatiently, "that M. de Witt frightened you into losing all the ground we

had gained. Of what use to me are a few plaudits in Middelburg if I lose the seat in the Council of State and the Captain Generalship?"

"You must not blame me for that," protested the Princess. "I could not defy M. de Witt, who is, after all, our master."

"You could have evaded him," said William. "But no, you must meet him half-way; and, after declaring me of age, render us both foolish by waiving all discussion as to my future until I am twenty-two, the age the State appointed from the first . . . M. de Witt promises his friendship in four years time—and for that you retract everything——"

"Indeed no——"

But the Prince swept aside her protestations.

"You gave your consent to my remaining under the guardianship of M. de Witt, just as you put my education into the hands of the States, when they made overtures to you."

"You have never forgiven it," sighed Amalia of Solms, "but it was always for your good that I acted. The States took you under their protection . . . I could do nothing for you."

William fixed his intense gaze on her.

"I would rather have been brought up by any poor pastor at a florin a week than by M. de Witt. You delivered me into a prison, Madame; and now, when I force the gates open, you close them on me again."

The Princess furled her fan with a rattle of the ebony sticks.

"Indeed you wrong me—and hurt me, William." She was flushed, distressed. "I did not dare offend M. de Witt—for your sake—it is better for you to have him as a friend than as an enemy. Where do we stand if he turns on us? The States——"

The Prince rose and leant against the mantelpiece, silencing the old lady with the manifest displeasure in his manner.

"Do not talk of the States, Madame, nor of the Republic," he said, with a disdainful accent; "the first are not in my way,

and the second is only a name. It is M. de Witt—always and only M. de Witt."

"He is but a servant of the Government——"

"He *is* the Government," retorted William, "and the one man who upholds it. Has he the suffrage of the country?—or even of the Assembly?—but they agree with him and obey him because they are not strong enough to resist. I tell you, Madame, it is that one man."

"You dislike him," sighed the Princess, as if she found it a matter for regret.

"Dislike him!" repeated William, with a peculiar intonation. "He hath kept me out of my birthright all my life; he, and he alone, prevents me from regaining it now. He—a burgher's son!"

The passion he put into these last words startled his grandmother. She gazed at him mutely, opening and shutting her fan in her lap.

The Prince advanced across the room, twisting his handkerchief in his fingers.

"It becomes almost more than I can endure," he said, breathing hard. "The other day I had to bring myself to speak him fair, and he must put his hand on my shoulder—and say he pitied me—and understood—understood—me!"

"He is a good man," said the Princess, "and of a noble intelligence. I think that he desires to do his duty by you."

The Prince was looking, not at her, but at the portrait of his father, whose dark eyes seemed to hold a melancholy yet fiery expression.

"I think M. de Witt does his duty very well," he answered, "but I am not a republican to second him in it. By what right does he think to bend me into a tool to aid him in his usurped dominion?"

The Princess' eyes followed her grandson's gaze.

"It was this spirit in your father cost our House its heritage," she said, half fearfully.

"It was M. de Witt!" William's eyes gleamed fiercely,

"His plebeian insolence! . . . It becomes very difficult for me to contain myself. . . . My father had *his* father jailed—into Loevenstein; I would I had *him* there—and his stiff brother too——"

Amalia of Solms made a startled movement.

"Hush! we must wait before we can speak in such fashion."

"I have been waiting all my life," returned William bitterly.

"You are young enough, you can afford to bide your time."

The Prince gave her a strange, half sad look.

"Can I so afford to wait, Madame? There is very much for me to do . . . perhaps not many years in which to do it."

"What do you mean?" cried the Princess, frightened.

"Why, it is of no matter," he answered, as if he already regretted having said so much, and he turned away abruptly and looked out of the window at the rain, the grey sky, and the dripping trees.

Amalia of Solms watched him, the old fear catching at her heart.

She had been told that it would be a miracle if he grew to manhood, as she had been assured that he would never survive his infancy. She trusted one prediction would prove as false as the other, but as she considered his frail appearance, his eyes shadowed with pain, his colourless face, his languid movements; as she recalled his incessant cough, his perpetual headaches, the horrible conviction struck her that it was impossible for him to live long. She had a vague, disquieting sense, too, of some vast, ambitious, and proud spirit contained in the delicate body. Her grandson had never made a confidant of her, but she felt he cherished designs of she knew not what magnitude, and she was troubled for the loneliness he would not allow her to share.

The tears came to her eyes as she looked at him.

He stood leaning against the window frame, one hand on his hip, his proud and commanding profile towards her; the low brow shaded by the dark hair, the pale mouth

firmly set. He wore his green velvet riding-dress and a plain cravat of Frisian needlework. He had no sword, for M. de Witt held that none save a soldier should go armed.

There was recalled to the Princess Amalia the image of another young man as she had seen him in his hunting dress, eighteen years ago, the last Stadtholder, not much older than his son was now, like him in features and in pride, on the eve, he believed, of absolute power.

The Princess could remember how he had bent his whip in his hand and spoken of "these presumptuous burghers!"

A week afterwards he lay dead of the smallpox in Guelders, and the triumphant States were casting a medal to celebrate their deliverance; representing the Stadtholder as Phæton, with the motto: "*Magnis excidit ausis.*"

"By his great designs he destroyed himself."

The Princess repeated the words to herself with a shiver, and the tears ran down her cheeks.

The parrot, turning himself in his ring, suddenly gave a loud and hoarse cry, as if tired of the silence.

William glanced up at him, then round at the Princess, who was hastily drying her eyes.

"I must be returning," he said.

"So soon?" she asked in a trembling voice. "Such a little while, and we have talked nothing but politics—will you not stay to dinner?"

"Madame, I cannot—I am forbidden to be long abroad without M. Van Ghent," answered William sombrely. "And since I do not choose to ask a favour or incur the suspicions of M. de Witt I am as restricted as a prisoner."

The Princess rose, raising moist and appealing eyes.

"You only came to tell me I had angered you!" she complained.

"I came to discover what M. de Witt had said, Madame. I do not blame you; there is no use in thinking of it any more, only, I entreat you, do not see him again."

"Since he is more than a match for me?" sighed the Princess. "Ah, you know a great deal for your age."

She was a gracious and charming lady, she adored him, and she was his father's mother, but she had delivered his town of Orange to the French and she had delivered him to the States General. William could not forgive these things. He had against her, also, her quarrels with the proud young mother he had worshipped, and her constant coquettings with the republican party. But he constrained himself to forbear with her now, endured her anxieties over his health, promised to write to her and send Mr. Bromley with messages; even took her caresses, let her fold her perfumed arms about him and again kiss his forehead.

She went to the window and watched him ride off through the rain; Mr. Bromley, blonde and fresh-faced, waving his hat to her. She had been told that Oliver Cromwell had said: "This William, son of the late King's daughter, will, if he lives, be heard of."

The words occurred to her now, with a mingling of pride and pain. She also was often lonely.

M. Simon Simonides, one of the clergy who made the pulpit the platform of opposition to the Government of John de Witt, arrived at the "Huis ten bosch" almost before the Prince had ridden out of sight under the dripping trees. He was a favourite with the Princess. Amalia of Solms, who was always served on gold plate, and the Calvinist pastor who lived on a hundred gulden a year, had much in common. She greeted him warmly, telling him that her grandson had just left.

"I would I had met him, Your Highness," answered the pastor, deeply disappointed.

"You do not know him, of course," she remarked.

"I know of him, Madame. M. Triglandt, at present exiled in Utrecht, hath spoken to me of him." The old man's countenance flushed. "I have seen His Highness' letters, I have seen his face in church. I know him a prince in a thousand; a nature as strong, as deep, as constant as any the Lord God ever made."

CHAPTER X

AT THE HOUSE OF M. LE MARQUIS DE POMPONNE

HYACINTHE ST. CROIX, awaiting the pleasure of his employer, was agreeably diverted by the view he had of an inner room furnished in white and gold and occupied by two ladies.

The house of M. de Pomponne was situated in the outskirts of the Hague, and transformed into as much resemblance to a French château as taste and money could accomplish.

The chamber in which St. Croix found himself was hung with fine Flemish tapestry, representing the legend of St. Ursula, and divided from the other apartment by carved doors that stood open, revealing an elegant room furnished in Spanish leather and tulip wood, and lit by the soft radiance of a crystal lamp.

Seated by the bright fire was a dark-haired lady in a brown velvet gown, engaged in making lace. St. Croix knew her for the Marquise de Pomponne; the interest of his gaze was all for her companion.

She sat by the tapestry-covered window, a Chinese table before her, on which stood a chess-board set with scarlet and ivory pieces.

Her profile, face and figure were towards St. Croix. She seemed absorbed in some problem that she had set herself, for she did not raise her eyes from the chess-board, and her only movement came when she lifted her slender hand to change one of the white or red men.

Her delicate features, the knot of her golden hair, the

slender lines of her figure in its tight blue gown were shown up distinctly by the dark background.

St. Croix, under cover of the space between them, stared at her boldly.

She was known to him by reputation, and he had seen her once before riding with de Pomponne on the Voorhout.

Glad was he of the chance to scrutinise her curiously at his ease, for she had a name powerful at Versailles. She was a woman he might be glad to have a word from, but he was well aware that her profession was nevertheless the same as his own, and that if she were more successful it was largely because she was less scrupulous.

He had heard her history, more than once, for it made a piquant story,—one not in the least to her credit, and containing incidents that it had needed a clever woman to get the better of, even at the Court of France.

He wondered what use de Pomponne could have for this lady at the Hague. The United Provinces seemed a field where her talents could find but little scope.

The entrance of M. de Pomponne disturbed both his reflections and his study of the slender lady with the chessmen.

The Marquis was not in the best of humours. He nodded to his visitor and flung himself into a chair, biting his glove.

His first remark was to complain that the candles were in need of snuffing. A servant was summoned and this remedied, then he deigned to look at St. Croix.

"This tool of yours, this Van Mander, has turned out very ill."

St. Croix flushed.

"There has been no harm, Monsieur," he said, secretly nettled.

"I am not so sure—first he returns you my letter to the Prince——"

St. Croix was surprised.

"You said, Monseigneur, that His Highness had explained he must avoid even the appearance of an intrigue."

"Well, well," the Marquis brought his hand down impatiently on the table,—“now I hear he has entered the Prince's service.”

“But he is not to remain at the Hague,” replied St. Croix eagerly. “No, Monseigneur, that could not be under the very eyes of M. de Witt—he is to be sent to Brandenburg to join M. Bentinck at the Elector's court.”

“Who told you so?”

“The man himself, Monsieur.”

“Then he is still in communication with you?”

“I see him occasionally.”

“But he is of no use to us?”

St. Croix shrugged his shoulders.

“I cannot tell.”

“It is your business to find out,” answered de Pomponne arrogantly.

“Only I ask you, Monseigneur, what can one do with these Hollanders? I have had this man in play for years, but——” he shrugged his shoulders.

“He is too much for you—which is a pity, for if you could have managed him he would have been very useful.”

“He was inclined to deal with us once, certainly; now, however——”

“Well, what has happened to him now?” demanded the Marquis sharply.

“He appears to be infatuated with the Prince of Orange.”

M. de Pomponne considered a moment.

“The Prince is friendly with us,” he said at length, narrowing his fine dark eyes.

“Many of his followers do not know *how* friendly, Monseigneur.”

The Marquis smiled.

“Mon Dieu, that is what I would like to know myself,” he said,—“*how* friendly.”

“A matter you cannot discover, Monseigneur, I cannot hope to.”

M. de Pomponne leant on the table, the candlelight

full on his handsome, florid face, his glittering, splendid clothes.

"It must be discovered," he said, and took his chin in his hand thoughtfully.

St. Croix glanced past him, through the open door, at the distant lady in blue.

"His Highness hath not shown himself unfriendly."

The Marquis shrugged his shoulders.

"He is politic, extraordinarily prudent for his age. I saw him the other day. He was courteous, protested his duty to His Majesty ; still, he refuses our help?"

"He fears to compromise himself in the eyes of M. de Witt," said Hyacinthe St. Croix instantly.

"You have gained nothing from this Van Mander as to the Prince's actual thoughts?"

"No, he is no way in his intimacy ; the Prince has hardly spoken to him."

"What we need is to gain some one in his confidence."

"I fear it is impossible, Monseigneur," answered St. Croix. "I believe his best friends are M. Triglandt, a fanatical Calvinist——"

"His former tutor."

"—whom it would be folly to approach——"

"Naturally—and the other?"

"M. Bentinck, at Brandenburg."

"It would be no use meddling with him——"

"There is the Princess."

"She knows no more than I, neither does M. Zuylestein." The Marquis frowned thoughtfully. "I am baffled at every turn ; I have nothing to send to His Majesty, nothing, and I know not how to act. Before I help place the Orange party in power I must be assured that they will serve me when they have arrived at it."

"The Prince could never stand alone, and where else should he find support?" returned St. Croix.

"I do not know—but he plays a deep game, this last move shows it."

"Some say he has but damaged himself, since he provoked such severity from M. de Witt."

"That very severity works to his ends since it further estranges the people from M. de Witt," answered the Marquis. "We may look out for a revolution, it is very plain. . . . That is not the point. The question is, what will this youth do when he obtains the power?"

St. Croix lowered his voice—

"If any can discover, you have one in this house——"

The Marquis glanced at him.

"You mean Madame Lavalette?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"She is leaving for Spain in another week." M. de Pomponne tapped his fine fingers on the table. "Besides—Mon Dieu, one has no chance."

"There is the ball at the Binnenhof, on Friday, Monsieur."

"It is not known if the Prince goes."

"Van Mander told me—yes."

"I wonder why?—I think he does nothing without a reason."

"To show himself—to speak to the Deputies."

The Marquis looked over his shoulder at the impassive figure of Madame Lavalette over her chess problem.

"He is a boy, Monsieur; in some things utterly untried."

"I confess it had occurred to me—but," de Pomponne shrugged his shoulders, "these Hollanders!—and the Prince is secretive—even for a Hollander."

"Still, Monsieur, you can try."

"You mean Madame Lavalette can try," answered the Marquis.

"It would be my advice, Monseigneur."

"Take most men—she would get more in five minutes than I in a fortnight," de Pomponne admitted; "but whether this little Calvinist——"

"He is seventeen, Monsieur—it is not possible he should possess the wisdom of thrice his age."

"Well, we will put him to the test;" the Marquis gave his indolent smile and pushed back his chair.

Hyacinthe St. Croix rose.

"I will send you a ticket for the ball," said the Marquis. "You had better be there."

"Thank you, Monseigneur."

St. Croix bowed till his yellow, frizzled hair fell over his face.

De Pomponne gave him a nod and a wave of a plump hand, which careless dismissal was all that he deigned.

When St. Croix had gone he leant forward and looked into the inner room.

His wife had left it, Madame Lavalette sat alone, fingering the red and white pieces. The Marquis de Pomponne rose and walked slowly over to her.

She turned on him large, deep blue and languishing eyes.

"I have just solved my problem," she said in a low and pretty voice.

"And I, Madame, want you to help me solve mine."

"Ah?" She sank back in her stiff chair, and taking up the red king turned him about in her fingers.

The Marquis leant carelessly against the carved window frame.

"You overheard, perhaps, what I was saying to Monsieur St. Croix?"

"No, Monsieur."

She glanced up. Her fair and shining hair was waved simply round her oval face and caught on her neck with a pearl comb; a few long ringlets fell on to her deep lace collar. Her face had a soft, almost plaintive expression, her mouth was small and wistful.

"Well," said the Marquis, "I will desire you to attend the ball at the Binnenhof."

"Monsieur," she answered, "I have M. de Louvois' commands to go to Spain."

"But you may do me this service first, Madame la Duchesse."

"What is the problem and the service, Monsieur?"

The Marquis, looking down at her indolently, frowned now discontentedly.

"The problem is the Prince of Orange, Madame—and the service——"

She interrupted with the slightest sparkle of malice in her tone—

"You call me in when you have failed—what would M. de Louvois say?"

M. de Pomponne answered in a vexed tone—

"I wish M. de Louvois was here doing my work and I at Versailles doing his, for, Mon Dieu! one might as well be sent on an embassy to the fishes as be asked to come into exile here where one's health is ruined by damp, one's temper by Leyden Logic—where the only amusement is the contemplation of Dutch virtue."

"It is the virtue that is the difficulty," smiled Madame Lavalette. "They are a quite impossible people—that is why, Monsieur, I am going to Spain—but you——?"

"I!" he answered impatiently. "It is like trying to negotiate with a lot of frogs, cold and stupid. When you have got through their formalities they start on their religion, and when they have finished with that they freeze into a silence——"

"That you want me to endeavour to break?"

"I should be your debtor for life, Madame."

She raised her brows.

"But, my friend, what do you think I can do?"

The Marquis knew that she had already failed to obtain even an audience of M. de Witt, though she had come to the Hague with the object of persuading him to the concessions required by M. de Louvois with regard to the herring fisheries; her question was, therefore, pertinent enough.

"I am thinking of the Prince."

Madame Lavalette showed some impatience.

"I am tired of the whole country, its psalm-singing burghers and its frogs—I wish to get away."

"Madame, the ball is on Friday, it would not detain you—and the Prince is different from these others."

"He does not interest me."

"Have you seen him?"

She shook her fair head—

"He is kept too close."

"Well, when you see him, and speak to him, you will be interested, Madame."

She replaced the red king on the board.

"Why?"

"He is an enigma."

Madame looked up. De Pomponne had piqued her curiosity and her vanity, as he intended.

"You think I can solve this enigma?"

The Marquis smiled.

"If any one can, Madame."

"I wonder?" she mused languidly, then she rose with a soft sound of silks.

"What do you want me to do?"

"To draw from the Prince something of his designs, something of his feelings towards France. In a word, Madame, to discover that which I have failed to discern—what manner of stuff we have there. If he worked with us, he would, as His Majesty's cousin, be of immense use; he could, without much difficulty, be placed at the head of the State——"

"Oh, I know the position quite well," she interrupted. "Considering that you have talked nothing else since I have been at the Hague, I should have it by heart; but, Mon Dieu, whether I care to meddle is another matter."

She crossed to the fireplace and rested the tip of her blue shoe on the brass curb.

"It will be very little trouble to you, Madame, and a vast service to me."

The Duchess looked at him over her shoulder with a little laugh.

"My good de Pomponne, this country is unnerving you!"

The Marquis did not deny it.

"I always protested against the appointment, as you must remember, Madame."

"But M. de Louvois was obdurate."

"As he always is," grumbled de Pomponne.

Madame Lavalette tapped her chin with the tips of her feather fan.

"The Prince hates women, I think," she said, "and all manner of frivolities——"

"He is as austere as John de Witt . . . but a great deal younger."

"And not so confirmed in severity?" She smiled and raised a face that was glowing a golden rose-colour in the radiance of the fire. "Maybe he hath lacked opportunity," she added. "Had he even the nature of a rake he could hardly have shown it under M. de Witt's guardianship."

"Mon Dieu, no!"

The Duchess looked thoughtfully into the clear flames.

She was angry with M. de Witt for having refused her an opportunity to execute her mission. Did she succeed in drawing the Prince of Orange she might avenge herself on the severe Grand Pensionary, and not wholly fail towards M. de Louvois. She foresaw that let M. de Witt once see her even speaking to William, he would take care no other chance would be given for the continuance of her intrigues, for he knew both her character and her mission.

But Madame Lavalette decided she might be careless there, for she was leaving Holland. She could also rely on accomplishing much in a short time.

She was not generally unsuccessful.

The thought of a youthful and royal Scipio was not displeasing to her vanity; and to play Cleopatra to an

Augustus of seventeen seemed to the Duchess both safe and amusing.

She turned her languishing eyes on de Pomponne's handsome, indolent face.

"Get me a ticket for the ball at the Binnenhof, Monseigneur," she said.

CHAPTER XI

THE BALL IN THE BINNENHOF

“**Y**OU are disappointed?” inquired Mr. Bromley.
Florent Van Mander answered slowly—

“I should have liked to stay in the Hague.”

“But you see it is impossible,” the Englishman assured him, with frank friendliness. “M. de Witt hath already spoken to His Highness about the harbouring of any who forsake his service,—and, indeed, the Prince is scarcely free to choose his household.”

Florent was silent. His desire was to serve the Prince personally, to have some chance of winning his favour, to be in the thick of events at the Hague, the seat of action.

Brandenburg seemed far away, and he had no interest in M. Bentinck. It was not for this that he had left John de Witt; but, having burnt his bridges behind him, there was nothing to do save to go on.

Mr. Bromley saw by his face he was not pleased.

“It shows His Highness thinks something of you, M. Mander,” he remarked, “that he puts himself to this trouble; and M. Bentinck is his best friend.”

They stood in one of the bare ante-chambers of the Prince’s Palace. M. Van Ghent had allowed William to see the secretary he was sending to the Elector’s court, and Florent awaited his audience.

He would rather have been alone or silent; but Matthew Bromley’s pleasant manners would not tolerate pauses. He snuffed the candles, pulled the dark curtains closer, and remarked that it was cold.

"And the night of the ball at the Binnenhof."

"The Prince is going?" asked Florent.

"Yes," Bromley answered, with some reserve.

The ball was in honour of the wedding of one of M. de Witt's cousins; William's invitation had been a command.

Florent looked at the Englishman keenly.

"You are very devoted to His Highness, are you not?" he asked curiously.

"I am," said Matthew Bromley simply.

"But you were in M. de Witt's employ——"

"Only before I knew the Prince."

"That is what I mean,"—Florent spoke quickly,—"before you knew the Prince. He cannot do for you what M. de Witt could, indeed he can do nothing at all; why are you devoted to him?"

Mr. Bromley's fair face took on a puzzled expression, he reflected, hesitated.

"I do not know," he said at last.

Florent drew a deep breath.

"Neither do I. . . . I also have left M. de Witt, and, in a way, ruined myself, and I do not know why."

"I like His Highness," went on Mr. Bromley, still trying to honestly answer the question. "Why are *you* devoted to him? But every one who comes near him would serve him to the death," again he reflected; again he added, "I do not know why."

He glanced up at Florent's grave face and laughed.

"I have no interest in your politics, you see, Mynheer; for me one is like another. I think M. de Witt is a great and good man, and I really know nothing about the Prince's character or designs—but, well, I just serve him. . . . I would follow him anywhere."

Florent walked up and down the chamber. He wore his dark travelling clothes, for he was impatient, since he must go, to be off at once. The place had become intolerable of late, since he was always afraid of meeting some of his old companions, or even M. de Witt himself.

Mr. Bromley rubbed his hands together. The large, princely, but bare, room was certainly both dreary and cold, scantily furnished, and ill lit by the two-branched candlesticks on the mantelshelf.

The pause was broken by the quick opening of the door.

Both the men looked round.

It was the Prince, though Florent did not instantly know him.

He wore a long dark mantle and a plumed hat. He did not uncover; he exacted as if by instinct the privileges of royalty, and his household conceded them. Despite M. de Witt he was surrounded by a court.

"Mynheer Van Mander," he said, with his usual slowness.

Florent flushed and bowed—over low for a good republican.

The Prince came down the long chamber.

"Are you prepared to go to Brandenburg?" he asked.

"Yes, Your Highness."

William made no answer, and Florent glanced, half covertly, at his face.

The Prince was looking thoughtfully at the floor, his features almost concealed by the shadow of his hat. Under his mantle could be seen the soft colour of his pale violet coat; one of his bare hands rested on his cravat, in the other he held a letter.

He spoke without looking up—

"I do not know that you gain much by the change of masters, Mynheer Van Mander. It is very quiet at my uncle the Elector's court, and M. Bentinck can only pay you moderately."

"I have decided to accept the post, Your Highness."

The Prince slowly raised the eyes he knew so well how to use, and let them rest a moment on Florent's face.

"I can promise nothing to any one," he said. "So if this is to worship the rising sun—think a little."

Under William's glance Florent's first flush deepened.

"I shall be glad in any way to serve Your Highness," he answered awkwardly.

William faintly smiled, and, half mockingly, put to him the question he had put to Matthew Bromley—

“Why?”

Florent faced the compelling gaze fixed on him, and found, this time, an answer.

“Your Highness makes me feel as I have never felt till now.”

“That is curious,” said the Prince, “for I have seen very little of you, Mynheer Van Mander.”

“But I have seen enough of Your Highness,” replied Florent.

The Prince was silent. His bearing seemed, if anything, to repel this homage, but Florent was sufficiently pleased that it was not utterly refused.

His annoyance at being sent to Brandenburg, his regrets for M. de Witt’s comfortable service, had vanished when he found himself in the presence of the Prince.

William’s subtle but amazingly powerful personal influence outweighed all considerations.

He awaited his instructions. He also had caught the trick of the Court; he followed Mr. Bromley’s example and waited for the Prince to address him.

William looked down again and coughed, then handed Florent the letter.

“This is for M. Bentinck, it is your introduction and your credentials. If you wish to serve me you will serve M. Bentinck—it is the same thing.”

Florent bent his head and placed the letter inside his breast pocket.

“M. Renswoude will meet you downstairs and give you the money for your journey,” continued the Prince. “Good-bye, Mynheer Van Mander.”

That was all.

William uttered none of those things that Florent, up to the last even, might have been expecting. Neither thanks nor caution did the Prince give him; did not bid him be faithful or discreet, yet expressed no trust in him; gave no explanation of,

and passed no comment on, his choice of him for this service.

He walked slowly towards the door, and Florent, in leaving the room, must pass him.

The Prince suddenly held out his hand and smiled. Florent felt the blood glow in his face. He went on one knee and raised the soft, white, and beautiful hand to his lips.

William wore a diamond ring, and the lace round his wrist was faintly perfumed. Florent noticed this; it was part of the appeal of rank and tradition, the fascination of royalty.

When he rose the Prince was no longer smiling, but Florent was amply repaid for any sacrifice he had made in joining his service.

William turned away as he left the room and walked back to where Mr. Bromley waited.

"That man can be faithful," he said as the door closed on Florent.

Mr. Bromley made a little grimace.

"He has not been faithful to M. de Witt, Highness."

"But he will be loyal to me," answered the Prince carelessly.

"You have the trick of it, Highness," admitted Matthew Bromley.

William frowned. Mr. Bromley guessed him to be in an exceeding ill-humour and ventured on no more.

M. Van Ghent sent up to say he was waiting for His Highness. The Prince discovered that he had forgotten his gloves, and Mr. Bromley went for them.

When he returned the Prince was still in his anteroom and M. Van Ghent still waiting below.

William took the gloves leisurely.

"What are these?" he asked.

They were a pair of white doeskin which Mr. Bromley had from the Prince's valet; he said so.

William turned them over, then put one on.

"They are a misfit and of paltry quality," he remarked.
"Who bought them?"

M. Heenvliet, who had been sent by the Prince's tutor, entering at the moment, interrupted—

"The coach is ready, Your Highness, and M. Van Ghent is waiting."

William gave him a half glance.

"Why, so you said." He turned to Mr. Bromley. "Fetch La Motte."

Matthew Bromley hesitated; but there was a set to the Prince's cleft chin intimating to those who knew him that his mood was to override opposition.

Mr. Bromley obeyed.

William pulled off the white glove, and when the valet entered the room turned to him angrily—

"Who bought these?"

"Mynheer Heenvliet, Highness."

"How much was given for them?"

La Motte looked at M. Heenvliet.

"The gloves cost six gulden a pair, Highness," said that gentleman, "and they are such as Your Highness hath often worn before."

"My faith, no!" replied William. "I have never worn such gauntlets. Six gulden a pair! I do not know what is the motive of this economy but I will not endure it, Mynheer."

Kerckhove Lord of Heenvliet flushed.

"Your clothes are bought under the approval of M. Van Ghent, Highness, and the authority of Mynheer de Witt."

The Prince's eyes were dangerously bright.

"All of which makes no difference, Mynheer; my income is sufficient to dress me better than a German count."

Mr. Bromley held his peace. It seemed to him that the gloves were well enough, and that the Prince wished to provoke his hated tutor, since His Highness lost no possible opportunity for annoying M. Van Ghent.

"This is merely vexatious, Highness," said M. Heenvliet, "and I must again remind you that for a trifling affair you keep M. Van Ghent waiting."

"It is no trifling affair, Mynheer," answered William, "to find myself on every hand ill served."

"That is not just, Highness."

The Lord of Heenvliet was forcing back his temper.

William flung the gloves down on a chair.

"I do not intend to wear them, Mynheer, either to-night or any other time."

M. Heenvliet bit his lip and turned to the valet. "Bring His Highness another pair of gloves." He pulled out his watch impatiently, "We are already late."

The Prince gave him a malicious look, and half smiled; to arrive late would be to solve the ugly question of precedence and would also mean a slight to M. de Witt.

"It is your place, Mynheer," he answered, "to see that I am better furnished."

He had never liked M. Heenvliet, who leant to the side of the Grand Pensionary.

"La Motte is a wearisome time," remarked the first gentleman-in-waiting to cover a somewhat heavy pause.

"He finds it difficult to discover anything wearable, Mynheer," answered the Prince calmly.

And to point his dislike of M. Heenvliet he approached Mr. Bromley, turning his back on the other.

"Are not you cold, Bromley? There should have been a fire here."

"Indeed I think so, Highness," answered the Englishman, who was not cold in the least, but who would have seconded the Prince in anything, even at the risk of his own disgrace.

It seemed that M. Heenvliet was about to answer this thrust at the management of the Palace, when M. Van Ghent entered with a vexed and flushed countenance.

"What is the cause of this delay?" he demanded, looking about him.

The Prince was coldly silent.

"His Highness complains of the gloves brought him," answered M. Heenvliet, "and takes this occasion to complain of the way in which he is served."

M. Van Ghent fixed his eyes on the Prince.

"Have I been kept waiting for this?"

"For this, Mynheer," replied William.

The Prince's governor appeared both angered and agitated. William's dislike made his post a burden.

"M. de Witt will be displeased at our late arrival—and what excuse shall I make?"

William gave him a haughty look.

"Tell him I will not wear gloves at six gulden a pair, Mynheer; and that till I have a voice in the choice of my personal appointments I shall continue to be dissatisfied with them."

M. Van Ghent, goaded, turned, with a weakness that further earned William's contempt, on M. Heenvliet.

"Why is not His Highness consulted?"

"His Highness is shown the accounts," answered the unfortunate gentleman-in-waiting.

"The accounts!" repeated His Highness sardonically. "Tis the difference between them and what I am served with that I complain of."

M. Heenvliet with difficulty controlled a hot answer.

M. Van Ghent picked up the gloves.

"What does Your Highness find fault with?" he asked.

"No gentleman in the Hague would wear them," replied the Prince; "and I complain, Mynheer, of the insult offered me in providing them."

"The gloves were bought after the pattern of others that have been to His Highness' liking," protested M. Heenvliet.

La Motte entered with another pair, white, trimmed with silver, that the Prince deigned to approve.

As he drew them on, his glance travelled from one to another with a malicious pleasure in the general discomfiture.

M. Van Ghent reprimanded M. Heenvliet, who in turn blamed the valet; Mr. Bromley looked uncomfortable.

William was the one unmoved; he even slightly smiled to see how red and annoyed was M. Van Ghent, and when he

reflected how late they would be at the Binnenhof his smile deepened.

He would have refused to attend the ball at all had he dared; but the humiliation of his forced appearance was softened by the thought of a late arrival that would annoy M. de Witt, and cheat M. de Montbas and M. de Pomponne of the triumph of precedence.

"It is a pity to keep the horses waiting in the wet, Mynheer," he remarked as he finished lacing his gloves. "I am ready."

M. Van Ghent had to make the best of this, as he had to make the best of numerous encounters in which His Highness was invariably victorious.

The Prince made another difficulty about the coach, wishing to ride alone with Mr. Bromley. But here M. Van Ghent was firm; he trusted neither William nor Matthew Bromley, and himself accompanied His Highness.

It was a foggy night, a little rain falling, and the Prince avenged himself on his tutor by insisting on having both the coach windows down. He declared he could not breathe with them closed, and M. Van Ghent had to submit and allow the damp and the mist to enter, to his great discomfort. He shivered in his mantle; and William coughed in a way that seemed to show he did not greatly benefit by the arrangement himself, but he remained resolutely by the window, looking out at the streets of the Hague, his back towards his tutor and the mist gathering in drops of moisture on his velvet coat.

M. Van Ghent, who by no means enjoyed thrusting his company where it was so obviously resented, was greatly pleased when they reached the Binnenhof.

They had some difficulty in making their way through the coaches that blocked the courtyard. William noted with satisfaction, and M. Van Ghent with annoyance, that theirs was the last arrival.

It was on Mr. Bromley's arm that the Prince leant in entering.

M. Van Ghent had no choice but to follow.

The Binnenhof was brilliantly lit, and decorated with an air

of solid, unpretentious wealth characteristic of the United Provinces.

The Truce Saloon, built by the last Stadtholder, had been arranged as a ballroom.

This was a pleasant chamber. A row of handsome windows overlooked the Vyver, giving in summer a charming view over the water and as far as M. de Witt's house in the Kneuterdyk Avenue; in autumn only the dim shapes of trees and the swans on the island were visible through the almost perpetual mist.

Now red velvet curtains screened the night, and a hundred wax candles gave a soft and lovely light.

It was an historic chamber also, and one that commemorated the dearly bought freedom of the Republic.

The pride of the Assembly and the fantasy of the artist had designed a symbolic decoration: circular ceiling paintings represented the different nations gazing down at the spectacle of the regained liberty of the United Provinces. A fine, warmly flushed picture of "Peace" faced the door, and above the deep fireplace its companion "War."

In the centre of the ceiling "England" looked down, and appeared to be coming down too, since the foremost cavalier of the group had placed a red-stockinged leg outside his frame; which was good painting and better symbolism, said some sourly. Twenty years had passed, and there had begun to be reason to doubt the friendly "onlooking" of England. Her regard appeared of late to be filled with coldness and envy.

France, represented by an effeminate cavalier, had its place above the picture of "Peace."

Every one agreed that as for symbolism this was not so good.

In the antechamber of the Truce Saloon, a fine apartment in panelled wood, the Prince found the Grand Pensionary.

With M. de Witt were M. Vivien, his brother-in-law and Pensionary of Dordt, Sir William Temple, and M. de Montbas.

M. Van Ghent stepped up to these gentlemen; but William's hand tightened on Matthew Bromley's arm and held him back.

The Englishman was quick to understand. His Highness' gaze was resting on M. de Montbas, who wore the splendid uniform of the Captain General and was girded with the sword that meant command of all the forces of the United Provinces.

A shiver went through the Prince's slender body; after a moment he left his gentleman and came forward.

M. de Witt greeted him quietly.

"I am sorry you are late, Highness," he added quietly.

William gave his reply with perfect composure—

"It was greatly against my wish, Mynheer," he said, and he spoke softly and even smiled.

"I will believe you, Highness."

The Prince glanced at M. de Witt's companions. He did not dislike Sir William Temple, but the others were his avowed opponents.

Several members of the Assembly advanced to greet him. He had to put a strain on himself and speak to them graciously, but when he came to M. de Montbas it seemed that his control would fail him.

This man had been in his father's employ, had deserted him for the republican party. He had been one of those who held the gates of Amsterdam against the late Stadtholder, one of those who had spoken most hotly against him.

Later M. de Montbas had made overtures to the widowed Princess; they had been haughtily spurned, though Amalia of Solms remained inclined to encourage a person of so much influence.

To complete the bitter hatred in which William held him, de Montbas was a man of wealth and abilities, and now in possession of those offices that were his birthright—the birthright of the heir of Nassau.

As de Montbas approached him the Prince perceptibly drew back, and his pallor disappeared under a slow blush.

He straightened himself, pressed his handkerchief to his lips, and eyed the Count with an expression of scorn and dislike not to be concealed nor mistaken.

No one there could guess what throbbing rage filled his

proud soul that he had to stand thus, swordless, before his father's enemies—a show for those who were both his inferiors and his masters; but all could see the sudden expression that sprang into his eyes, and all were startled.

M. de Montbas, ill at ease, made a mistake. He resorted to a courtesy not untouched by cringing; it was the one thing above all others to rouse William's fiercest scorn.

"I am glad to have this opportunity of paying my duty to Your Highness," he said, and bowed like a courtier.

William smiled bitterly.

"Your duty!" he repeated. "Your duty, M. le Comte!"

Then he turned on his heel and passed into the ballroom.

M. de Montbas, flushing hotly, looked at M. de Witt, and the Grand Pensionary frowned.

It fell to Sir William's easy tact to break the pause.

"I think the dance has come to an end, sir; are we too grave to attend the ladies?"

Secretly he admired the Prince; and his admiration grew with his observation. His eyes twinkled now with enjoyment of M. de Montbas' discomfiture. M. de Witt was quick enough to see where his sympathies lay, but he accepted the diversion of Sir William's remark, for the Prince's daring could not be publicly noticed.

M. de Witt, composed in mien but with a troubled heart, followed into the ballroom.

Most noticeable as he entered was the figure of the young man in the long violet coat, his bright, heavy hair glittering like copper in the candlelight.

He was speaking to the Princess Dowager; above them glowed the picture of "Peace."

"Your charge troubles you, Mynheer?" said Sir William in his soft, lazy voice, after watching de Witt a moment.

"In so far that I do not understand him, yes," answered the Grand Pensionary.

The company, walking to and fro in their velvet and satin dresses, shut out the long violet coat and William's slender figure.

"He is a remarkable young man." The Englishman spoke reflectively.

"He is like his father," responded John de Witt.

"With a difference." Sir William smiled. "The late Stadtholder failed—this Prince, I think, would not."

CHAPTER XII

THE SPY OF FRANCE

THE Princess beckoned her grandson with her long gold fan.

"You have been talking to Madame Van Decken the whole evening," she said

William, having advanced beside her chair, waited, without any show of interest, for the Princess to enlarge on her remark.

"Madame Van Decken is quite the plainest lady in the room."

"Is she?"

Amalia of Solms half laughed.

"Why, she squints!"

"Yes, I noticed that," answered William; "but she is very intelligent."

The Princess looked at him in a half troubled way.

"At your age!" she exclaimed. "There are half a hundred ladies awaiting your request for a dance——"

"I shall not dance at all," he interrupted. "What are we here for, Madame? Merely to grace M. de Witt's triumph."

The Princess gave a sigh that flashed the diamonds on her purple bodice.

"I wish you would not take it so bitterly . . . M. de Witt means to be courteous."

"What courtesy was it that forced me and M. de Montbas to meet?"

"He wishes to reconcile you."

William smiled scornfully.

The fiddles were tuning up and the dancers taking their places on the polished floor.

"You make a mistake," said Amalia of Solms. "These women have some influence—they have a right to feel slighted. You should take more pains to please."

The Prince made no reply. Amalia of Solms cast a half timid glance at his composed profile, and the fan fluttered nervously on her velvet lap.

"You think that I am a silly old woman, no doubt, William, but believe me I am right. M. de Pomponne said the same to me—that you kept yourself too close."

The violins struck up a French sarabande, and the dancers began to move slowly to the stately melody.

The Prince looked across the ballroom to where M. de Witt, noticeable in black velvet, stood in the doorway talking to a little group of gentlemen, and so absorbed was he in his scrutiny that he did not hear the Princess rise.

She had to touch him on the arm to attract his attention.

"M. de Pomponne, William."

He turned quickly.

The Princess swept a courtesy before she sank again into her gilt chair, and the Marquis, gorgeously dressed in crimson satin, bowed till his long love-locks hid his face.

"Is not the Prince dancing, Highness?" he asked.

William's intent gaze was now fixed on the Frenchman; he said nothing.

The Princess shrugged her shoulders, half vexed.

"You must ask him, Monsieur."

The Marquis smiled.

"There is a lady present whom I have promised to present to His Highness——"

"One of your countrywomen, Monsieur?" asked the Princess.

"Yes, Madame."

"I shall be honoured, Monsieur." The Prince's tone was quiet.

"I refer to the Duchesse de Lavalette—will Your Highness accompany me?"

Something to his grandmother's surprise William went instantly. The Princess watched the two figures turn out of the ballroom with some satisfaction. She had always considered the French alliance her grandson's best hope.

The antechamber was full of the music of the sarabande that came through the open doors, the music and the sound of the ladies' dresses as they swept the polished floor.

M. de Pomponne stepped quickly up to one of them who sat alone on a carved settee.

"Madame la Duchesse, I present to you His Highness the Prince of Orange—Monseigneur, Madame Lavalette."

She rose, and each took a swift look at the other.

William saw a woman of a dazzling fairness of hair and complexion, and bright blue eyes, wearing a low-cut and rich gown of green velvet; and Madame Lavalette beheld a slight youth owning a remarkable face, plainly dressed, and of a haughty demeanour.

She gave him a glance of pretty hesitation.

"Alas, I have not your language, Monseigneur!"

"I can speak yours, Madame," he answered in French.

"Ah, I have heard that Your Highness is an accomplished linguist."

"It is not an accomplishment, Madame, but a necessity."

"Many princes do not think so."

Her eyes flattered him though her lips were unsmiling.

"I do not speak as a prince, Madame."

He was absolutely grave, and in no way discomposed by her splendid presence.

"As a diplomat, then?"

"As one training to be of service to his country, Madame."

Her delicate eyebrows slightly arched.

"Do you wish your gifts to be of service to the Republic, Prince?"

"The United Provinces are the Republic, Madame, and the United Provinces are my country."

Madame Lavalette unfurled her fan.

"It is generous of you, Monseigneur, to be patriotic under the present form of government——"

"Why, Madame?"

She found him at once more difficult than she had expected and it roused her.

"Oh, perhaps it is not generous, but politic," she said, with a change of tone. Then she laughed and looked at him straightly. "Personally I do not like M. de Witt," she declared, with a charming air of frankness.

William raised his expressive eyes slowly.

"He is my best friend, Madame."

The Duchess, gazing at him intently, read in his eyes the contradiction of his words.

"I see what you mean me to believe, Prince," she murmured.

The second measure of the sarabande had begun; Madame Lavalette beat time to it with her fan on her delicate hand.

"It is a pretty melody—do you like music, Monseigneur?"

"I think it can be made useful, Madame."

"That is a curious thing to say—you mean——?"

"In war," he said.

She gave her rare, effective smile.

"And in peace?"

"It is not necessary, Madame."

Now the Duchess sighed.

"You can say as much of all the arts—but Your Highness is not always so stern?"

"I am very ignorant on these matters, Madame," he answered.

"You like gardening?" she asked, knowing he did.

"It is a pleasant recreation—and I think the building of houses a fair pastime for a gentleman."

She flushed into enthusiasm.

"You should see Meudon, Marli, Versailles!" she cried.

"You would appreciate them—palaces——"

He interrupted her.

"Such as I shall never achieve, Madame. My father built these modest rooms, nor am I like to build anything finer."

She glanced at his grave young face.

"Now why?" she asked, her voice falling softly.

"Because I think to have other things to do, Madame."

The sarabande had come to an end.

The Prince turned to his companion with a composed air of courtliness—

"May I lead you out for the next measure, Madame?"

"I shall be honoured, Monsieur."

Her eyes added more. There was something in the very carriage of her body, as she bent towards him, her head slightly drooping, that was subtly flattering—the more so that it came from a beautiful woman to a youth. She was more deferential and charming than she had meant to be, for his grave coldness forced her to use her weapons.

"Seventeen!" she said to herself. "Mon Dieu, seventeen!"

The next dance was a minuet.

"The music by Lulli," she informed the Prince, "and called 'Le Temple de la Paix'—take me to represent France, Monseigneur, and the title as an omen——"

"Of peace, Madame?"

"Do you not care to think of peace, Monsieur?"

"I am, Madame, in no position to think of war."

As they passed into the ballroom she shot a look at M. de Pomponne. The Prince was at least dancing with her, her eyes bid the Marquis take note of it.

He was not the only one to observe them. The Princess marked with satisfaction, and M. de Witt with uneasiness, the Prince's partner for the minuet.

Happily la Lavalette was below the middle height, and William tall for his age, so she was able to rest lightly on his

arm and look up to him with blue, languishing eyes that held a very flattering deference.

M. de Pomponne turned away to hide his smile; M. de Witt looked on sternly.

The Duchess glanced at the paintings round the ceiling.

"Your Highness likes history?" she asked. "You like to read it?"

"I would prefer to make it, Madame."

She looked at him quickly.

"Your House has made it, Prince."

He smiled.

"Madame, it is through my House that we are here now,—it is through my ancestors, and by what they have done, that the United Provinces are a kingdom."

"The country hath been ungrateful, Prince."

His smile made her air of sympathy seem foolish.

"You think so?" he said.

She was piqued by his sovereign manner.

"Do not you, Monseigneur?" she retaliated with meaning.

"I think it remains to be proved, Madame la Duchesse."

They stood by the open hearth, waiting for the dance to begin. She was very well aware of the curious eyes upon them, and of the cold regard of the Grand Pensionary.

The Prince appeared absolutely unconscious.

"M. de Witt does not dance, I see," she remarked.

"He hath other things to think of, Madame."

She gave him a grave but ardent look.

"Such as—revolutions?" she breathed.

"Maybe, Madame; the most securely placed will sometimes think of revolutions."

Madame Lavalette was silent. De Pomponne had not prepared her for a youth so haughtily self-possessed, so (seemingly) impervious to flattery and enticements.

She knew of his upbringing in austere surroundings, she knew something of the Dutch stateliness of manner; but this perfect composure and gravity on the part of a Prince of seventeen were, nevertheless, a surprise.

Madame Lavalette was familiar with most of the Courts of Europe, and had considered herself equally familiar with most types of men—even men like John de Witt; such were rare, but she had met them.

But in William of Orange she found what she could not place or label. She went cautiously, a little bewildered, a little piqued, and more impressed by this boy's personality than she would have cared to admit.

The musicians played the prelude; the couples took their places.

Madame Lavalette glanced again at the Marquis, who danced with Lady Temple, and he raised his brows and slightly shrugged his shoulders as if he commiserated her on an impossible task.

Sully's lilting melody began.

The Prince danced as he rode, with consummate excellence, but, unlike his horsemanship, his dancing was without animation. It seemed to his partner that he was not listening to the music in the least nor thinking of her at all.

Once or twice he looked distinctly away from her, in a mournful, absent manner down the room; as if he looked through the dancers and saw something else beyond. When their hands touched she felt his cool fingers resting on hers as lightly as they might have rested on his gentleman's shoulder.

She was silent until the elaborate figures had come to an end; then she laughed.

"Your Highness does not like dancing."

He turned his great eyes on her.

"I have been clumsy, Madame?"

"No—you have it in your head—perfectly—Prince, not, I think, in the least in your heart."

"That is probably true," he replied gravely.

"It is a pity, Prince—for the ladies." She suddenly laid her hand on his sleeve. "Whom will Your Highness dance with now?"

"I shall dance no more, Madame."

"You are very severe, Monseigneur—or are you proud?"

"I am tired," said William simply.

They returned slowly to the antechamber and reseated themselves on the carved seat where he had first found her.

Behind them a crescent of candles in a silver sconce lit her fair hair, her white shoulders, and the voluminous folds of her green velvet gown.

She unfurled her fan and gazed at herself in the little heart-shaped mirror in the centre of curling feathers.

"I think you are somewhat heartless," she remarked. "Every lady in the ballroom wishes to dance with Your Highness—and I dare swear half of them are your admirers already."

Glancing at him furtively she perceived that, in utter absence of vanity, he did not even colour.

"There are other cavaliers here, Madame."

Madame Lavalette beat her little silver shoe on the gleaming floor.

"And so M. de Witt is your best friend?"

The sudden change of attack did not confuse him.

"I said so, Madame."

"I know a better."

She fixed her eyes boldly on his face and leant forward a little, holding the open fan.

William did not answer. He was looking away from her, through the doorway into the ballroom, where, under the picture of "War," the Grand Pensionary conversed with M. de Pomponne.

"Your Highness can guess whom I mean," breathed Madame Lavalette.

"Why, no, Madame."

The fan fluttered and the mirror in the centre gave out golden rays as it caught the candlelight.

"Your cousin Louis, Highness," she said under her breath.

Now he turned his head and fixed on her his compelling gaze.

"The King of France," she repeated.

"I have always hoped to deserve His Majesty's friendship," said William formally.

Madame Lavalette fixed his eyes with her glance.

"Will you not be more frank with me, Prince?" she said in a low voice.

"In what manner, Madame?"

"Ah, you know," she leant towards him, "I speak of the King of France—you know what he can do for you . . ."

William moved his head so that the heavy auburn hair concealed his face. She thought that he still looked at M. de Witt.

For a moment she hesitated. But, after all, she might be fairly sure of him; it was boldness that was needed in dealing with such reserve, and boldness that M. de Pomponne lacked.

"His Majesty hath much influence in the United Provinces, Prince;" she raised her fan to her lips.

They were alone in the antechamber; from the ballroom they could be observed but not heard.

The Prince did not answer.

"More influence than you imagine, Highness, believe me."

He moved, but did not look at her. Her eager scrutiny could gain nothing from his pale young face.

"I can credit it, Madame," he said.

She ventured further.

"His Majesty is the most powerful king in the world, Highness, and if he wished a thing done no one could successfully oppose him."

"It may very well be, Madame."

"His Majesty is your very good friend, Highness."

The Prince kept his eyes lowered, his head slightly turned from her scrutiny.

The Duchess continued—

"If the King willed your restoration, Prince, he could accomplish it."

William answered calmly—

"Sometimes M. de Witt talks to me of politics, Madame—

and from him I learn that the King of France is not friendly towards the United Provinces."

"Not towards them or M. de Witt," she answered swiftly, "but towards you—does not Your Highness understand?"

William looked up now.

"Scarcely, Madame."

She was spurred to go further than ever de Pomponne had ventured.

"The King finds the United Provinces in his way, as you do, Highness ; he finds, as you do, that M. de Witt must go. Your cause is one with His Majesty's—say so, and the thing is done."

She thought, but could not be sure, that he slightly drew himself away from her into the corner of the settee.

"His Majesty," she continued, "has the power to put you where your father was——"

"And afterwards, Madame?" asked the Prince. "How should I repay His Majesty?"

Madame Lavalette began to be more sure of her ground.

"Your Highness," she said softly, "would have the help of France in subduing an impudent and ungrateful country—Your Highness would be master of Holland——"

"Under King Louis," added the Prince.

"Under the protection of France, Highness ; His Majesty is already the dictator of Europe."

It was a prospect calculated to dazzle one powerless and ambitious.

Madame Lavalette was pleased to see her words take effect. The Prince slowly coloured, and put his hand in an agitated manner to the lace on his breast.

"I understand you now, Madame."

He gave her an extraordinary look, the meaning of which was beyond her.

"I never doubted your intelligence, Prince—and you did right to be cautious ; but now I think we may speak more plainly."

"M. de Pomponne hath hinted at this, Madame.

"I do more than hint."

The dance music floated in from the Truce Saloon, and the Duchess' waving fan kept time to the slow melody.

"You have but to let His Majesty know your sentiments," she urged.

William sat still, leaning against the arm of the settee, his right hand resting lightly on his breast.

His grey-green eyes were dark with feeling, and the flush still lingered in his cheeks. She was satisfied that she had touched him, and touched him deeply.

With some curiosity she waited for him to speak; he interested her. A smile touched her lips as she thought of the gravity of their converse and the twenty years between them.

He accepted her with amazing good faith; in some things he must be very simple. It was not displeasing to her to reflect that she was the same to him as the irreproachable dames of his own country, whose velvets swept the floor in the ballroom.

"Shall not M. de Pomponne convey some message of duty from Your Highness to His Majesty?" she asked to probe his silence.

The colour deepened in his face. Madame Lavalette wondered why.

"His Majesty would not value the duty of one as unimportant as myself, Madame."

"You are His Majesty's cousin, Prince, and he would restore you to those offices M. de Witt has usurped. Do I now speak open enough?"

"His Majesty would do this—on conditions."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"On easy ones."

"Perhaps, Madame—I should find them outside my power to fulfil."

Madame Lavalette laughed.

"Ah no! His Majesty thinks of a French match for you,"—she sought to still further dazzle him,—“he will restore the town of Orange——”

"In exchange for the liberty of the United Provinces," interrupted William calmly. "Is not that, Madame, the price?"

"If you will put it so bluntly, Your Highness, then yes."

The Prince was breathing rather quickly.

"There is one difficulty."

"It can be overcome," she answered, smiling.

"I do not think so."

"What is it?"

He raised his beautiful eyes, they were almost unnaturally dark and bright—

"I am a Calvinist, Madame," he said gravely.

Madame Lavalette dropped her fan on to her lap.

"Well?" she questioned.

"His Majesty is of the Romish faith."

She bent her head.

"It is not a religion, Madame, beloved in the United Provinces."

She made an effort to meet him in this new position.

"We do not talk of religions, Prince."

His eyes narrowed; again he gave her that inscrutable glance.

"I talk of mine, Madame."

"What has it to do with the matter in hand, Your Highness?"

To her further bewilderment he smiled, with composure, and, she thought, a touch of scorn.

"I believe, Madame, in predestination."

"Your Highness is confusing me with Leyden Logic," she answered; "it is not this we are speaking of——"

"It affects what we speak of, Madame."

She bit her lip.

"How, Highness?"

"Because I do not believe, Madame, that I am predestined to be the tool of the King of France. The Princes of my House have left behind them records that teach me different aims and higher ambitions."

With that he rose.

The pride and daring of this speech confounded her as if he had used sudden violence. The colour gathered in her cheeks and her blue eyes became bright and hard.

"You think, Madame, that I am impolitic," said the Prince, who had now easily the mastery of the situation, "but while I am the subject of the Republic it is you who are impolitic to broach to me my cousin's designs."

She rallied herself as best she might from his unlooked-for defiance.

"Your Highness surprises me. Are you wise—are you in a position to take this tone to the King of France?"

William put his hand to his side where his sword should have been—

"I am grateful for his Majesty's private friendship—but he mistakes my importance in the State. You should go, Madame, to M. de Witt."

He gave her a glance that brought a flame into her blood, bent his head, and turned away.

Madame Lavalette sat as he had left her, her hands either side of her, on the settee, and the angry red in her face.

In a few moments M. de Pomponne came up. Seeing him she rose angrily.

"Ah, Madame," said the Marquis softly, "you have been no more successful than I."

She bit her full under-lip.

"He will not burn his fingers in any intrigue, that boy," she answered; "and you are a fool, M. le Marquis, to meddle with him. What use is he to us?"

"He is too prudent."

"Or too honest. A Calvinist—and tells me so—here. Quoted his House, Mon Dieu! . . . He might have been seventy—the other side of things. . . . His company hath frozen me—and heated me too. . . . I hate him. Take me home, Marquis."

M. de Pomponne saw she was unusually angered; he pursed up his lips and shrugged his shoulders.

"The Prince will be glad of the offers he rejects now—in a while," he answered.

She swung her fan to and fro.

"I would give something to be the one to master him."

Then she laughed.

"If you do not get me out of this puritanical country, de Pomponne, I shall die of spleen."

The Prince had returned to Amalia of Solms, who was conversing with Lady Temple.

"Good-night, Madame," he said abruptly. "I am leaving."

"So soon?" Her voice was touched with dismay.

Lady Temple moved away.

"Why should I stay?" asked William wearily.

The Princess changed the subject.

"What of Madame Lavalette?—I saw you dance with her. She is very beautiful and—influential."

The Prince answered, still in that tired, absent way—

"She is old—a spy of Louis and stale at the game."

The Princess was startled, both at his clear vision and his calm statement.

"Oh, be careful!" she whispered.

"I know no other word for spy, Madame."

The Princess rose and touched her grandson's shoulder.

"You frighten me, William. . . . Madame Lavalette represents France."

The Prince put his hand to his forehead and answered in a low but moved tone—

"I listened to what she had to say. . . . She insulted me . . . like every one." His eyes flashed bitterly. "Even Bromley thinks he serves the puppet of France. . . . And you, Madame——" He checked himself scornfully,— "But let it go."

"I do not understand," faltered the Princess.

"No one understands . . . save M. Triglandt." He kissed her hand. "Good-night, Madame."

She made confused protest, but he left her without further ceremony.

In the antechamber the Prince met the Grand Pensionary, his leave-taking was brief; M. de Witt received it coldly.

"The ball was in honour of my cousin, I should have been pleased if Your Highness could have danced with her——"

"Mynheer, I was in no mood for gaiety."

M. de Witt, too proud to remind him that he had danced with Madame Lavalette, made no answer, and the Prince left the Binnenhof with an aristocratic slowness and an air of sombrely contained haughtiness.

Gaily the music rose over the splendored company. Mingled with it was the sound of laughter, the swish of silks.

The Grand Pensionary of the United Provinces was standing apart from the dancers.

Madame de Lavalette passed him with a deep courtesy.

"Old—the spy of Louis and stale at the game . . ."

She was summing herself up in words much like those the Prince had used; her smile was cynical.

"I have been at it twenty years—I had better leave youth alone . . ."

She passed down the stairs William had just descended, the candlelight on her white shoulders, her gleaming fair hair, and the long pearls in her ears.

Behind her went M. de Pomponne, smiling.

M. de Witt looked after them with a foreboding expression in his sad eyes. The Count de Montbas in his resplendent uniform, hitching at his great sword, joined him.

"What is the matter, Mynheer?" he asked in a tense voice.

M. de Witt gave a start.

"I?—what do you mean?"

The Count smiled uneasily.

"You are disturbed, Mynheer."

"Read you so much in my face?"

And John de Witt caught the other by the arm and walked with him across the chamber. For awhile he did not speak for there had fallen on him a bitter sense of chilly fear; it seemed that the music had stopped and the candles gone out.

He shuddered.

"The Prince," he said. "Did you mark him . . . and the Frenchwoman?" his fingers tightened on M. de Montbas' arm. "My Republic . . . God help me! . . . God help me, Count! . . . for I am afraid . . ."

PART II

THE PRINCE

“I challenge all our histories to produce a Prince in all respects his equal; I call the differing humours, interests and religions of the world to witness whether they ever found a man to centre in, like him . . .

“He might have raised his seat upon his native country’s liberty, his very enemies would have supported him in those pretences; but he affected no honours but what were freely offered him, there or elsewhere . . .

“And his ambition, that was only useful, knew how to wear, as well as how to deserve them.”—WILLIAM FLEETWOOD, Bishop of St. Asaph, *Sermon*.

CHAPTER I

THE RETURN OF FLORENT VAN MANDER

MR. BROMLEY was watering his flowers and feeding his pigeons, and singing to himself a snatch of an English song, as he moved to and fro in the pale spring sunshine that filled his little room in the Palace.

Being disturbed by the entry of a servant, he turned his watering-can in his hand and ceased his singing.

"Pardon, Mynheer, it is M. Bentinck's secretary who hath arrived at the Palace, and, His Highness being abroad, he wishes to see you."

Matthew Bromley reflected.

"M. Bentinck's secretary, by name Florent Van Mander, is it not so?"

"Yes, Mynheer."

"Then bring him here."

Florent Van Mander, entering immediately, had a pleasant picture of the Englishman standing by the open window with a row of tulips and narcissi showing behind him on the sill, and the grey and white pigeons circling above the gaudy flowers.

Mr. Bromley was cordial.

"We have not forgotten each other, Mynheer!—but it is not so long——"

Van Mander closed the door.

"Three years. It is three years since I was last at the Hague," he said jealously.

"And three years of big events," conceded Mr. Bromley. "But where is M. Bentinck?"

"He fell ill at Hertogenbosch;" Florent spoke briefly. "And I left him there, in his cousin's house—he sent me on to acquaint the Prince of this delay——"

Mr. Bromley emptied his can, threw the last handful of grain to the greedy pigeons and closed the window.

"His Highness will be disappointed," he remarked. He looked cheerfully at Florent. "Are you glad to have left Berlin?"

"I am glad to return to the Hague."

Mr. Bromley leant against the window frame and observed him.

He could find no change whatever in him. Florent Van Mander appeared, as formerly, an alert, reserved, grave young man—a dull fellow Mr. Bromley called him inwardly.

"The Prince was expecting M. Bentinck to-night," he said.

"M. Bentinck is furious at the mischance that keeps him——"

"He was glad to be recalled?"

"Naturally—does it not show the altered position of the Prince that he can recall him?"

Mr. Bromley moved to the oak overmantel and took from it a blue pot of deep red tulips that he placed on the table by the window.

"M. de Witt is still Grand Pensionary," he remarked, "and this country is still a Republic,—but, as you say, the Prince's position has altered."

"Since he obtained the seat in the Council of State?"

"That was two years ago." Mr. Bromley was removing the dead flowers from among the vivid blooms. "He hath taken a good many steps since then."

"The whole country shouts for him," said Florent. "It seemed to me that in every village I passed through they execrated the name of M. de Witt. But will you obtain me an audience of His Highness? I bear him a letter from M. Bentinck."

The Englishman raised his fair face from the flowers.

"The Prince will be back at any moment, I think," and he glanced at the clock. "He hath gone to the 'Huis ten bosch.'"

"M. Van Ghent is no longer governor here?" asked Florent suddenly.

Mr. Bromley smiled.

"The Prince so wearied him with marks of his dislike he petitioned to be released from his post; so, consulting their own dignity, Their High Mightinesses declared His Highness free from tutelage. I'm glad of it——"

"M. de Witt opposed it—of course."

"Of course," repeated Mr. Bromley, carrying the tulips back to the mantelshe'lf. "He opposed his election to the Council—he opposed his journey to England——"

"On what grounds?"

Mr. Bromley shrugged his shoulders in a good-humoured manner.

"Doubtless he feared King Charles would win the Prince over to his designs,—and certainly if flattery and gaiety, and the temptations of a gorgeous Court——"

"Did you accompany him?" interrupted Florent enviously.

"Yes. We were fêted for three months, but the King and the courtiers did not take to the Prince, he was too austere—he was the idol of the people though," added Mr. Bromley, who had a light, indifferent, and vague way of referring to political matters. But he saw that Van Mander was interested deeply in what had occurred during his three years' absence from the Hague—so it was right he should be—and so Bromley strove, honestly, and with some difficulty to himself, to satisfy his curiosity.

"M. de Witt thought the Prince would be dazzled," he explained, thrusting his hands into his pockets,—“so there was bad feeling over that; and then there was the seat in the Council of State, and His Highness' salary—and the affairs abroad——"

"Do you think there will be war?" again Florent broke in.

"The French are in Lorraine already,—M. de Witt hath passed the war budget and is striving for an increase of the Army,—yes, every one says that there will be war."

Florent coloured.

"France provokes it wantonly, on the thinnest pretexts," he said hotly.

"Umph!" Mr. Bromley slightly grimaced. "England is in it too; you heard, of course, of the treaty of Dover?—the counter stroke to the Triple Alliance——"

"Sir William Temple, I hear, hath been recalled——"

"And de Pomponne—Downing is the English Ambassador now."

Florent rose.

"What does the Prince think of all this?"

"The Prince is striving for the Captain Generalship."

"Will he get it?"

"I cannot tell. M. de Witt opposes it with all his power—he sees in it the first step towards the restoration of the Stadtholdership; yet nothing less will content the Army and the people."

Florent was silent. He did not like Mr. Bromley, shallow he thought him—he was, too, a foreigner.

His own eager reflections lay too deep for any expression. He saw the terrible shadow of France falling over his country, distracted by the agony of internal conflict . . .

Nothing could save them . . . they would be subjects of Louis. John de Witt had no more power to prevent it. . . . Well, the Prince would get what price he could from France once he was Captain General, and he, Florent Van Mander, must follow the example. He had served the Prince in the person of M. Bentinck, faithfully, for three years—it would be remembered to his credit.

Out of the certain ruin facing his country those who followed the Prince alone could make easy terms with France . . .

He was startled from his sombre reverie by a message from His Highness.

The Prince had returned, and would see the messenger from M. Bentinck immediately.

Mr. Bromley, still busy with his flowers, nodded carelessly and pleasantly, and Florent was led to the apartment where the Prince awaited him.

It was with an unreasonable sense of agitation that he came into William's presence, with an unnamable feeling of excitement that he looked across the chamber.

It was in this same room he had taken leave of the Prince three years ago. It seemed in every detail unchanged.

Florent recalled the precise and sombre furniture, the dark walls, the portrait of Mary Stewart, Princess of Orange, above the mantelshelf, the table between the windows covered with books and papers, the shining brass fireirons and the blue-tiled hearth.

To-day the room was filled with the hazy February sunshine, and on the black lacquer cabinet inside the door stood, unexpectedly, a bowl of white and yellow narcissi.

The Prince was standing in the far window embrasure, with his back towards the door.

He wore a velvet suit of a colour he affected, a clear violet. He held his riding-whip behind his back, and the sunlight picked out bright threads in the long hair that fell between his shoulders.

Florent closed the door.

Slowly the Prince turned and shot him a keen glance.

"Ah, the messenger from M. Bentinck."

He held out his hand for the letter, and by his manner it seemed that he had forgotten he had ever seen Van Mander before.

"M. Bentinck is ill at Hertogenbosch, Highness, otherwise he would be here in person."

William took the letter and broke it open. M. Bentinck's secretary stood with his hat in his hand, eagerly observing the master whom he admired blindly and did not understand.

His first impression was that William had changed con-

siderably. He was of the same stature, having come early to his full height, but of a more robust appearance, though his face still retained a look of delicacy. His air of assured self-containment, his expression of calm gravity had deepened. He had always been sure of himself, now he wore the air of a man sure no less of others, sure of his own influence to sway whom he would to his will.

He had lost some of his repression, it seemed; was no longer equally on his guard as to what he said or how he looked.

As he stood quietly reading his letter he conveyed a personality startlingly masterful and daring. Florent felt as if some one touched him, gripped him, so strong was the influence of the slim and silent figure.

William at length looked up.

His face had slightly altered. He was not so pale, the curved lips were set firmly in an expression of half scorn that seemed habitual, his brilliant eyes were controlled to an unfathomable austerity, and the peculiar cleft in his chin was more noticeable.

He wore slight moustaches in the French style that added to his age, and was dressed for riding even more simply than Florent.

"M. Bentinck is not seriously ill?" he asked.

"No, Highness, a chill—a slight fever——"

"When will he be able to come to the Hague?"

"In a day or so, I think, Highness."

William looked again at the letter.

Florent did not know how to face the disappointment of the Prince's total forgetfulness of himself; his three years' exile were ill repaid by this . . .

Again the Prince raised his eyes.

"Are you pleased to return to the Hague, Mynheer Van Mander?"

A hot flush swept across Florent's face.

"I thought Your Highness did not recall me."

"I recall you very well, Mynheer—M. Bentinck speaks

highly of you ; if you choose to remain in my service, it is open to you—here.”

Florent found himself foolishly unable to frame an answer. He had felt himself slighted, and now he was over-rewarded ; shame silenced him.

“ I imagine you will care to stay,” said William, eyeing him.

“ It has been my ambition, Highness.”

The Prince put the letter away in his pocket.

“ You will see M. Renswoude, who is now head of my household ; I need another secretary. I will speak with you again. Meanwhile, Mynheer, I thank you for your fidelity to M. Bentinck.”

Florent, quivering with pleasure, bowed low.

The Prince turned to the table between the windows.

“ First I will request you to return to Hertogenbosch, Mynheer, with a letter for M. Bentinck.”

He sat down, wrote hastily, in a large, flowing hand, a few lines, and sealed them in a cover with the signet on his thumb.

As he rose again the door was opened.

“ Highness, the Grand Pensionary is below and requests an immediate interview.

It seemed to Florent’s acute observation that a malicious and triumphant expression flashed for an instant in William’s eyes, but he answered quietly—

“ I will see him here.”

As the servant withdrew, William seated himself before his papers again, handing Florent the packet for M. Bentinck.

“ Return as soon as you may and—an easy journey,” he said.

Florent bowed himself out as he would have done from a king’s presence, flushed, with a high beating heart, and well repaid for those tedious three years in Berlin.

William watched the door close, then leant back in his chair.

Papers, drawings, plans and maps were scattered before him. Some of the drawers of the cabinet were pulled open,

and the long, fuchsia-shaped, brass handles glittered, where the sun caught them, in stars of gold.

Several books, on mathematics and geometry, were piled together, and upon them was placed a vase in the shape of a Chinese monster holding a single crimson tulip.

The sun, slanting in through the long window, caught this flower and picked it out, like a bell of blood against the dusky background, then fell full on the thoughtful figure of the Prince, outlining it in a misty radiance.

The rest of the room was golden dark, for the heavy curtains were half across the windows, and the light filtered through them in a subdued hue, so that M. de Witt, entering the chamber, had his attention fixed at once by the Prince and the tulip, the objects upon which all the sunshine fell.

With every day now de Witt and this young man he gazed on drifted farther apart. They had not met privately for months.

William turned slowly in his chair and rose.

"I am grateful for this, Mynheer," he said, and it was the manner of a king with a subject, "for I wished to speak to you."

The Grand Pensionary advanced into the room. He was splendidly dressed, for he had been attending the second reception of Sir George Downing by the States General, and, though still in mourning for his wife, his black was put aside on this occasion. He wore a crimson mantle embroidered in gold, and a coat laced and beribboned.

"There is much to say, on both sides, Highness," he answered gravely.

The Prince remained erect, with his hand on the back of his chair.

"Will you be seated, M. de Witt?"

The Grand Pensionary came slowly down the room, holding his velvet mantle across his breast. His demeanour was stately to haughtiness, his lips unsmiling and his eyes severe.

"It is a long time since you and I have spoken together," he said.

"You have been much occupied, Mynheer," replied the Prince.

He continued to stand. Mynheer de Witt seated himself in a deep, Spanish leather chair facing the window, but enveloped in the hazy, golden, dusky shadows.

"It is not preoccupation hath kept me away," said the Grand Pensionary, "but distaste to broach with you matters on which we cannot agree. Since we cannot meet as friends, Highness, it is painful to me that we must meet at all."

"Why not as friends, Mynheer?" asked William quietly.

John de Witt looked at him steadily and mournfully.

"Because there is no friendship in your heart for me, Prince."

"I can assure you that you mistake me—I am capable of separating the man and his office, Mynheer."

"I am one with my office," answered the Grand Pensionary proudly. "What I say publicly I do not abate one jot in private. Whilst this Republic chooses me as its representative I shall serve openly, and with all my power, the liberty and independence of the United Provinces—both against foreign tyranny and native ambition."

"Is this a threat?" asked William.

"I do not use those weapons, Prince. . . . I have come here because I have had rumour of many things thrust upon me. . . . I wish to hear from your own lips what you intend to do."

"What have you heard of me from others?" questioned William. He looked down at the floor.

John de Witt raised his head a little.

"M. Fagel, M. Beverningh, M. Asperon are your friends or followers, their party is powerful in the Assembly; at this time, when we should be most united, they harass and thwart the Government at every turn——"

William glanced up, the sunlight full across his face.

"You can easily silence this faction in the State, Mynheer."

"Only by concession, Highness."

The Prince's fair hand moved slightly on the carved back of his chair.

"You have come to accuse me of causing sedition in the Assembly," he said calmly. "You always regarded me as troublesome," he smiled faintly. "However . . . what I have to say to you touches this same subject, Mynheer."

"The welfare of the State, Highness?"

"Yes."

"What has Your Highness to say to me?"

"You know, Mynheer, what question it is that agitates the Assembly—I put it to you three years ago and you refused——"

"Then I refuse it now," answered John de Witt.

"The times have changed," remarked William laconically.

"But I have not," replied the Grand Pensionary gravely.

"Still, I will again ask you, Mynheer, to consent to my appointment to the Captain Generalship."

The Prince picked up his whip from among the papers and looked at it as he spoke.

The angry colour rushed into John de Witt's worn face.

"My answer is no," he replied sternly; "and I am surprised at these presumptuous pretensions."

The whip shook a little in William's hands.

"Why?" he asked, speaking slowly by reason of the control he was exercising. He kept his eyes still on the whip.

"Because it hath been decreed by law—a law that I have sworn to—that all discussion even of your election to this office be deferred till you are twenty-two."

"Are you going to stand to that, Mynheer? I am twenty-one."

"I hold," answered John de Witt, "to the letter of the law."

William raised his wonderful eyes.

"And yet you speak of friendship. . . . You have always opposed me . . . always," he pressed his handkerchief to his lips and coughed. "You opposed my election to the Council of State."

"I should again oppose the election of a Prince of eighteen to the Assembly of the Republic."

"You opposed my journey to England," continued the Prince, "because you thought my uncle would seduce me into furthering his designs." He drew a quick breath and looked away from M. de Witt,—“Is it because you still have such suspicions of me that you withhold the Captain Generalship?”

There was an instant's pause before the Grand Pensionary answered—

"No—no!" Some agitation showed in his voice. "I would not dishonour myself with such unworthy thoughts, but there is too much at stake."

"There is everything at stake," said the Prince. "The very existence of the United Provinces is at stake."

"You are too young to have this tremendous responsibility --too inexperienced——"

"The Stadtholder Maurice was only eighteen when he took command of the Army," flashed the Prince.

"You quote an unhappy example, Highness. Prince Maurice took advantage of his position to become the tyrant of the people."

William looked at him under lowered lids.

"You speak as the admirer of John Van Olden Barnenveldt," he said slowly.

It was a bold and dangerous allusion, since the Grand Pensionary Barnenveldt had perished on the scaffold for *his* opposition to the power of the Stadtholder Maurice.

"I do." John de Witt's voice was cold.

"And as an enemy of my House."

"As an enemy of sovereign power in your House, Prince."

William laid down the whip.

"You, Mynheer, will urge the Assembly to refuse me the Captain Generalship?"

"With all my power."

The Prince bit his lip, and his lids drooped farther over his brilliant eyes.

"To whom does the Assembly intend to entrust the Army?"

"Your Highness knows—Major General Wurtz, the Prince of Tarentum, the Viscount de Montbas."

"Those are your men?"

"They are the tried and experienced soldiers to whom I am prepared to entrust our defences—if God refuse us the peace which I still hope for."

William half turned towards him.

"Peace! You still hope for peace—after the treaty of Dover, after the invasion of Lorraine, of Munster and Cologne; after Downing's audience of the States, his insolent demands, his frivolous complaints. Peace! You should open the campaign to-morrow, Mynheer."

John de Witt replied firmly—

"Still do I hope to avert the war——"

"You have been hoping that these last two years, Mynheer."

"Almighty God helping me I shall succeed in it yet."

The Prince's eyes flashed impatiently.

"I would sooner pray Almighty God to help me drive out the French."

"That is the talk of selfish ambition," answered the Grand Pensionary. "If once we embark on a war with France and England only a miracle can save us—" he gave a half sigh, and repeated—"can save us."

"To that end—the end of peace—you make concessions."

"I have been forced to. I have conceded the supremacy of the seas to England, Downing had his answer to-day——"

William coloured swiftly.

"That acknowledges this country subject to the King of England," he remarked quickly.

"It gives us, Prince, some chance."

"Our deliverance lies in the sword," said William shortly.

"Untried enthusiasm speaks there," answered John de Witt not unkindly. "We are a people whose prosperity depends on peace. Our commerce is our glory and our wealth. We have shed enough blood in the past to defend it. . . . Now we are prosperous, rich, free, and powerful . . . to twenty-five years

of peace we owe this. . . . A war would be disastrous . . . disastrous."

"It is, I think, inevitable," struck in the other.

John de Witt half smiled sadly.

"Does Your Highness question my statesmanship?"

William was silent a moment, evidently considering how he should shape his reply.

The sun had moved, so that it fell across the centre of the floor in a heavy beam of gold, leaving the Prince in shadow.

"I think that, the war budget having been passed a year ago, the country should be in a better condition to resist invasion," he said at length. "The people are taxed almost beyond endurance; two forced loans have been raised, and both the land and sea forces are wretchedly inadequate. I do not know who is responsible for these things, Mynheer."

He coughed, and looked sideways at the red tulip.

"You take something on yourself, Highness," returned John de Witt, "to say this to my face; it is an indictment."

"I am not in a position to criticise you, Mynheer," answered the Prince, and the scornful curve to his mouth was now noticeable beyond mistake. "Since I have no share in the government, these things are no affair of mine—but M. Fagel brought me your book——"

M. de Witt was betrayed into hot speech—

"Gaspard Fagel fawns on you . . ."

"I think he wishes to serve me," returned William quietly. "You taught me finance—and some other things—and I have applied your lessons to your practice—for my own instruction, Mynheer."

John de Witt looked at him curiously.

"I do not quite understand Your Highness."

"No? There is little need—as you say. What have I to do with the government of the United Provinces?—I asked your influence in the matter of the Captain Generalship——"

The Grand Pensionary interrupted haughtily—

"Prince, I can no longer discuss that subject; under no conditions will I be party to giving you this position. You

must serve before you can command; know something of war before you can be put over men like Wurtz and Prince John Maurice, Montbas and the Prince of Tarentum."

William answered, keeping his glance upon the papers scattered over his desk—

"I know enough to tell you, Mynheer, that if you do not strengthen the frontier the French will cross the Rhine—and once the Rhine is crossed, Utrecht falls . . . and half the Republic is lost."

"You speak as if judging me remiss in my duty to the State."

"I speak from my conviction, Mynheer."

"It hath not been wholly in my hands," answered John de Witt, with a stately control. "What hath been done hath been done by much reflection and varied advice. How would Your Highness have it different?"

"It were very idle to talk of what I cannot perform," said William. "Put me in command of the Army and I will show you what I will do."

The Grand Pensionary rose with a glimmer of red and gold.

"Never!" he said firmly, "never . . ."

The Prince was still standing, his hand resting on the back of his chair and his eyes cast down. His very quiet conveyed a passion and a determination that John de Witt felt meeting his own firm resolve, iron striking iron, the unyielding strength of two opposed natures brought into contest.

"Mynheer," said William, "there are those desirous of obtaining me this appointment—I have, as you say, some friends in the Assembly——"

Between them fell the gold bar of sunshine, dancing with a million motes. Each saw the other beyond it, in a haze of dusky shadow.

"You intend to push the matter to extremes?" asked John de Witt.

Their eyes met.

"Have you come to request me not to?" returned William, with meaning.

John de Witt coloured at the tone.

"No, Highness," he answered proudly. "I will request of you nothing."

"Their High Mightinesses will decide between us," said William, with a stress of mockery on the title. "I am sorry that you will not help me——"

"And I, Prince, am sorry that you should have asked it of me," replied the Grand Pensionary with a mournful dignity; "it makes weightier my almost intolerable burdens, my almost crushing duties more difficult, that you, and at this crisis, should distract the State with your pretensions and adopt this position towards me."

William again lowered his eyes; he seemed to be considering. After a second he smiled.

"I also grieve that you should refuse me, Mynheer."

His eyes flashed an upward glance.

"Perhaps it is not wise!"

"It is right," answered M. de Witt. "Your friendship would mean much to me—but I cannot purchase it at any such price——"

"We are both too obstinate," said William, almost insolently; "there is no need for more talk on the matter."

M. de Witt gathered up his mantle.

"Good even to Your Highness."

"Good even, Mynheer."

The Grand Pensionary regarded him with a touch of wistfulness and hesitated a moment; but William stood motionless, obviously waiting for him to leave, and John de Witt turned away.

Again it was the manner of a sovereign with the subject; the Prince seated himself before the Grand Pensionary had closed the door.

The smile still lingered on his lips, he took a letter from the pocket of his coat and slowly unfolded it.

It was from Fagel.

William re-read the last sentences—

"Your Highness' affair goes well in the Assembly. M. de

Witt hath but little influence now. In a few days you will be Captain General, since both General Wurtz and Prince Charles have promised to refuse should the office be offered to them, and since the clamour of the people is no longer to be withstood . . ."

CHAPTER II

AGNETA DE WITT

“**D**ID you see the Prince to-day, my father?”
Agneta de Witt dropped her fine sewing into her lap and looked at the Grand Pensionary.

They were together in the garden, under the new golden foliage of the wych elms and limes. The air was filled with a soft and melancholy sunshine; the trees cast faint and moving shadows over the black-clad figure of John de Witt, who leant back in the rustic seat and, his face resting on his hand, gazed at his daughter.

“I saw him this afternoon, Agneta.”

“I thought, sir, that you had.”

“And why?” The Grand Pensionary smiled.

Agneta fixed her pale blue eyes on him anxiously; her colourless, gentle face looked pure and grave as an infant’s in the precise white cap.

“Forgive me, sir—but it is because you have seemed sad.”

“I am tired,” answered John de Witt quietly. “Very tired, Agneta.”

His daughter turned her face away.

Across the close grass came a couple of pigeons, white on the green, and the two on the seat were so still that the birds strutted to their feet.

“You are always tired now, sir.”

“I can expect nothing else, my dearest.”

She picked up her sewing.

“And you are so seldom here . . . you have not sat like this with me . . . for so long, sir.”

"The house is too sombre for you," answered John de Witt tenderly. "You must return to Dordt——"

"No," breathed Agneta quickly, looking up into his face. "Oh no! let me stay here, sir."

"My dearest!"

He laid his fine hand lightly on her shoulder.

"If I could help you . . ." she said in a low voice.

"There is no help for us save in God," answered the Grand Pensionary gravely, "and surely He will not forsake us."

Agneta bowed her head low over her sewing. The white pigeons brushed her long grey skirts with their wings, and the sunshine flickering through the lime leaves caught the pale yellow locks on her smooth brow.

"You are always sad when you have seen the Prince, father. I think he is an ungodly young man."

John de Witt smiled mournfully.

"You must not dwell on politics, Agneta."

"I cannot help it." She kept her lids down that her father should not see her eyes were filled with tears. "I . . . I hear such horrible things, I see you so occupied, so weary . . ."

He answered her with a grave tenderness—

"We are in troublous and bitter times, dearest. Danger to the State, to each and all of us, is very near; dismay unmans many . . . but I hope to save the Republic, Agneta; you must pray that God will give me strength."

"I am praying for you, sir, in my heart always," the tears trembled on her cheeks.

There was a pause.

The pigeons fluttered away, and up through the sunny leaves.

"Will there be war?" Agneta spoke at length, under her breath.

"I think there will be war."

John de Witt's gaze went past his daughter, as if it rested on some threatening vision of the future.

She shyly wiped her tears.

"With France—and England, father?"

"I do fear it, Agneta."

She shuddered. War was a terrible thing to her, but still more terrible was the anxious bearing of her noble father.

"The people riot, sir; is it because of the war?" she asked timidly.

"It is the Prince's faction," he answered abstractedly. "He is extraordinarily beloved by the people, Agneta."

"He hath done nothing," she said simply. "Why do they riot?"

"He would be Captain General . . . and it may not be."

A colour came into her fair face. "I fear and dislike him!"

John de Witt turned his soft gaze on her.

"Nay, Agneta—do not say that, nor think it."

Once more the white linen she sewed sank into her lap.

"Sir, the other day on the Voorhout there was a man wearing an orange favour—he had others with him—I was with my aunt Johanna, and when they saw us, these men, they called after us insolently—my Aunt Johanna asked one of them 'Why?' He said, 'We are for the Prince and you are John de Witt's women'—and the crowd were with them, sir."

John de Witt frowned and coloured.

"You never told me this."

"No—perhaps I should not have told you now, my father," her eyes rested anxiously upon his face; "but—the Prince cannot be your friend, sir."

"He hath no control over the brawling mob," answered the Grand Pensionary hastily. "He would not wish me to be insulted. . . . I must make an example of some of these rioters—an example," he repeated.

Agneta put her little hand timidly on his arm.

"Sir, we are no longer beloved in the Hague nor at Dordt . . . they say such things of you——"

There she checked herself. They had all agreed to keep from John de Witt what his growing enemies said of him.

"It is not strange," he answered mournfully; "but it is strange, and cruel, that it should come to thy ears, Agneta."

A frightened expression stole into her large, pale blue eyes.

"Father, why are these people turning against you?—nay, I must speak of it—M. Fagel is no longer friendly——"

"He hath elected to follow the Prince."

"And—and there are others . . ."

"Dearest, very many forsake me . . . but God will support me in what I have to do."

"Will—will my uncle Cornelius have to go with the Fleet?"

"I think so, dearest."

Agneta reflected a second, then said—

"But we are always victorious on the sea."

"Cornelius and the others, Agneta, will do their utmost to preserve this dear land's liberty . . . and we must trust in God."

"My uncle Cornelius could never be defeated," insisted Agneta. "But you are anxious."

He stroked the little fingers lying on his sleeve.

"About the India fleet—now being convoyed home—de Ruyter hath gone to meet it—but I am anxious, sweet——"

"Would the English attack it?" Her fair brows contracted.

"How wise thou art become!" He smiled down into her upturned face. "Yes, I do fear the English ships."

"But war is not yet declared, my father."

"No, and may not be—still there is so much—so much—and I am tired, dear, how tired I only know when I rest—and to think they hate me, Agneta."

"Ah, no one hates you!" she cried.

His sad smile deepened.

"Did you not say so, yourself, dear heart, but now? The people have neither trust in me nor love—after twenty years of toil—of such toil. . . . Do you recall, Agneta, how they repaid Olden Barnenveldt?"

"Father!"

"He was a virtuous man, Agneta, and did more for his country than ever I have been able to do."

She went very pale.

"But—father—it is not possible!"

"What, dearest?"

"M. Olden Barnenveldt was beheaded, father!"

"Sometimes I think of it—to-day when I crossed the Plaats——"

Agneta shuddered.

"Sir, do not speak like that."

He roused himself from a sad reverie.

"Nay, sweet heart, I must not grieve thee with my foolish thoughts; 'tis not often that thou beguilest me into talking State affairs here—where I am at peace."

He glanced with a sigh round the quiet garden.

"And I am so seldom at peace now I am a very fool to mar it. We will talk of other things."

"There is nothing else that interests me, father."

"That must not be, see how I have distressed thee. Nay, do not spoil my little hour of repose with these tears, dearest. . . . Why should you weep? Indeed I am well, only tired, a little tired, dear. . . . Nay, this is weakness, my Agneta."

She was weeping silently.

"My burdens are not more than I can bear, but it hurts me you should weep."

She stifled her tears.

"I think of you always, sir. When I was away in Dordt I wearied to be here—and I can be of no use to you . . . you are lonely."

"Lonely?" he echoed wistfully.

Agneta trembled closer to him.

"Since my mother died . . ."

He took her hands and gazed down into her sad face.

"Thy mother was very gentle and timid, dearest . . . perhaps she was spared more than she could have borne. Perhaps had she known she would have chosen . . . to go . . . and I to let her . . . they cannot insult her, she died while her name was still respected. . . . Ah, thou art a beloved child . . . and hast her eyes. . . . 'Blessed be God in happiness and affliction' . . . 'The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away' . . ."

He drew her gently towards him and kissed her forehead.

"While we do our duty we cannot be wholly unhappy, Agneta; and while the angels are about us we cannot be lonely—not wholly lonely."

The sun reddened to its setting, and a full and ruddy light was shed among the quivering leaves and over the spring grass.

The chimes of the Groote Kerk fell on the silence with a swift, clear rise and fall.

Agneta dropped her head on to her father's breast and sobbed.

"Why—what is the matter?" he asked, distressed.

She sprang up holding her hands before her face, and fled, leaving her white sewing on the grass.

John de Witt sat silent, his form half bowed, his head bent.

Beside Agneta's place rested a paper-bound book, his own, he saw: *On the Value of Life Annuities as Compared with Perpetual Annuities*—the book of which the Prince had spoken. It dealt with the enormous difficulty of the war taxation; a monument of learning, of research, of patriotism.

Agneta, who was gravely studying mathematics, had begged a copy from her uncle Vivien and carried it about with her. It touched John de Witt exceedingly to see it there.

Had she been reading it that she might understand his learned talk of the means by which he had saved the finances of the United Provinces?—poor child! . . .

He sat for a while staring at the humble little volume; hands and brains for once idle, the sunset flushing the garden about him and the tender breeze caressing his face.

When he at length slowly moved at the sound of a step on the gravel path he saw his father, Jacob de Witt, coming towards him with the careful gait of age.

The Grand Pensionary rose smilingly.

Jacob de Witt was still as erect as when he had defied the

Stadtholder, William II., in 1650. A fine and sedate gentleman, with soft white hair falling under his black cap; stern, melancholy, and pale.

"Sit down, John, I wish to speak to you."

The Grand Pensionary obeyed. The elder de Witt, despite his eighty-two years, still held important offices of state and had the manner of authority.

He seated himself beside his son.

"This must be answered," he said. He held out a paper in his colourless hand.

"Another pamphlet"—John de Witt's tone was mournful. "Father, they are distributed openly, under my very eyes. What may one do but scorn them?"

A silence followed. The life of John de Witt had been austere and irreproachable beyond that of any man of his time; yet his father knew that the violence of party hatred was holding him up to the contempt of his fellow-citizens under every vile aspect imaginable.

For twenty years of upright dealing, of pure patriotism, of incessant toil; for an unswerving devotion to his friends and a generous and unchanging policy of conciliation towards his enemies, he was now rewarded by the basest ingratitude from the opponents he had always respected, and with the vilest accusations from the people whom he had so nobly served.

These things were in the mind of Jacob de Witt as he looked at his son, and even the stern resignation taught by their common creed hardly sustained him against these bitter calumnies of his beloved's name.

John de Witt was the first to speak.

"Why should we trouble about these things?"

He took the pamphlet from his father's hand gently, and laid it on the seat between them.

The elder de Witt's voice trembled a little.

"This must be answered, my son—every citizen of the United Provinces is reading it—the charges are most gravely and categorically stated . . . the vileness of it is almost beyond credit."

The Grand Pensionary half turned and picked the pamphlet up.

It was entitled: *Advice to every Good and Faithful Hollander.*

"What do they say?" he asked wearily.

"They say—" Jacob de Witt drew himself erect,— "this libel says that you have purloined money from the Treasury and sent it to a bank in Venice, where you propose to retire after the conquest of the United Provinces . . . That you have betrayed your country by leaving it without defence, and that you have appropriated yearly eighty thousand florins of the Secret Service money . . ."

John de Witt rested his tired eyes on the gentle trees.

"How can I answer that?" he said simply. "The mere frothings of spite."

"You must answer it—you must disprove it!" cried his father firmly.

"Disprove that!" He half smiled.

"Ay! A villain may throw mud at a saint," said Jacob de Witt, answering his son's meaning of lofty contempt,— "but if it is not removed it leaves a smirch; no saint even may disregard these things. What hath the Republic come to that any should dare what this man hath dared?"

He struck the paper, and his dim eyes flashed fiercely.

The Grand Pensionary put his hand to his brow and pushed back the soft hair.

"My life hath been entirely open. . . . My money hath been invested entirely in the public funds—with the fortune of Holland, my fortunes fall—every one knows this. Can I stoop to defend myself against party lies?"

"Your silence will not disarm their implacable resentment—you must turn on them."

"Ah, I have so much else to do, my father, so much . . ."

The light had faded from the garden and lingered only in the tops of the trees and on the roof of the modest house. It was quite warm; the pigeons flew up through the golden air,

in among the leaves of the limes, and back again to the bright grass.

"I think there will be war," said John de Witt suddenly, and with a terrible note in his voice. "I would God would let me give my life to avert it—war, in this rich and prosperous country, war against overwhelming odds," he stared straight before him with narrowed eyes—"war provoked by base tyranny of the French and baser tyranny of the English—what have I to do? For they hate me—how can I serve them when they hate me?"

"There are those who are faithful." Jacob de Witt grasped his son's hand.

"I have given Gaspard Fagel the Grand Secretaryship," answered John de Witt in an absorbed way, "to win him to us . . . but on every side they fall away from me. . . . It is strange that I should be so hated——"

"We are in the hands of God, who for His own ends tries us."

The younger de Witt bent his head.

"I show myself a weakling, I am tired to-night. I saw the Prince this afternoon, and it saddened me—I have been disappointed in him."

The one-time prisoner of Loevenstein answered sternly—

"He is a worldly, ambitious, and deceitful young man—a danger to the State. Little do I doubt he is in league with Charles Stewart, as little as I doubt he is behind such attacks as these."

He struck the paper on the seat beside him.

"I believe nor one nor the other," answered John de Witt. "It must be that he is honourable, and I know him God-fearing."

"He is even as his father was!"

"The Captain Generalship is his claim now—and he is well supported."

"If he obtain it—'twill be the first step to the Stadtholdership."

"If I have any power left, father, he will not obtain it—

and if he obtain it in spite of me, he will find that the office is incompatible with the Stadtholdership." John de Witt set his lips firmly. "I have seen to that."

"He hath an extraordinary presumption to pretend to such an office!"

The Grand Pensionary answered slowly, almost reluctantly—

"I believe it is the wish of the Army—such is their folly."

"They are very eager to forge their own chains," said Jacob de Witt grimly.

"It is a strange thing—I think it is the name hath the glamour—they would take him untried . . ."

John de Witt paused a moment, then went on in a low and laboured voice—

"There are so many difficulties . . . a domestic revolution threatened . . . a foreign invasion . . . but if they trusted me I could save them yet . . . from France and from themselves."

He straightened himself and put his hand to his breast.

"If they should give this command to the Prince, if they should put into that boy's hands all our defences . . . and he should . . ."

"Play us false," finished Jacob de Witt sombrely. "Well, what then?"

"What then? . . . Ruin! . . . This land, that we have made one of the greatest in the world, would be a fief of France before the year is out."

He bent his head for a moment, then rose abruptly.

"Father, I envy Cornelius, who can work with his hands, and pay with his blood; I would I might face the enemy on the high sea, nor stay here to face the factions with weary logic."

"Your task, being the more difficult, is the more glorious, John."

The Grand Pensionary pressed his hand to his brow and gazed at the glimpses of fading sky to be seen between the fluttering leaves.

"It is nearly twenty years since I took up this responsibility.

... They cannot say that I have served them ill, as far as my abilities went——” He roused and controlled himself. “It is not often that I talk so weakly—let us go into the house, it grows cool here, under the trees.”

Jacob de Witt rose and took his son’s arm.

They were both of a height, tall, upright; dressed alike in black with lace collars, the same in demeanour and expression, the grey locks touching the brown as they walked slowly through the twilight that was gradually falling over the garden.

The birds made a pleasant noise in the upper branches, and above the low brick wall was a vision of sunset clouds, pink, remote and peaceful, floating across the placid sky.

Agneta de Witt stepped out of the long, open windows; a slim and pale figure in the uncertain light.

She came to meet her father.

“Aunt Johanna says that you stay out too late, sir, and that it is yet over soon in the year to be abroad after the sun hath set.”

All traces of tears had vanished; she spoke with a grave air of wisdom.

Jacob de Witt smiled at her.

“Hast a letter there?”

She held it out eagerly.

“Yea, sir, from Anna.”

“From Anna!” repeated John de Witt tenderly. “What does she say?”

“That she is coming home to-morrow, sir.”

“Nay, that cuts her holiday too short.”

“She says she is resolved to come, sir.”

“And what else, dearest?”

“Oh, she says my aunt Maria took her to the fair at Dordt—and that they had a feast of pancakes, and all drank your health twice over.”

She slipped her letter into the Grand Pensionary’s hand.

“There is one for you indoors,” she added.

They entered the house by the wide-open windows of the

library ; at that moment a servant brought in the candles, and the two men paused on the threshold of the room.

At a lacquered Chinese cabinet Maria de Witt, in a prim white dress, sat on a high chair, her feet dangling, laboriously and gravely writing with a huge quill that waved over her shoulder and tangled itself with her yellow curls.

Beside her, tiptoeing that he might see, was her little brother, who supported himself by his hands on the desk.

A child still in skirts sat on the floor near them ; he was in red leading-strings fastened to a heavy arm-chair, and appeared to be engaged in working his feet out of his shoes.

Agneta pursed up her mouth.

"Maria cannot write because John spills the ink, he spoilt my letter to Uncle Cornelius this morning."

The Grand Pensionary caught his breath and turned away quickly to the mantelshelf.

He leant there, looking down into the empty hearth.

"Father," Maria lifted a flushed face, "how do you spell 'trouble'?"

John de Witt glanced up and gazed at her.

"What need hast thou for that word, Maria?"

"She is very ignorant," said her brother scornfully ; "I know how to spell it," and he struggled to wrest the pen from her.

"Thou needest not use the word trouble to thy uncle," said Jacob de Witt.

"I write—'There is much trouble at the Hague'; is it not true, father?"

"Yes, dearest," he answered gently. "Agneta will tell thee how to spell it."

"I know," insisted the younger John.

The Grand Pensionary met his father's glance across the room that was now filled with the pleasant candlelight, then crossed to the child on the floor and stood him up.

"Thou art almost too old for petticoats," he smiled.

The little Jacob looked at him and smiled back brilliantly. John de Witt dropped on one knee beside him, and Agneta

came and stood behind them, uneasy because her brother's jacket was crumpled, and, to her housewifely eye, untidy.

But the boy's father did not notice that; he smoothed the fair curls with a gentle hand.

"I think thou hast grown since I saw thee last," he said yearningly.

With a sudden shyness the child hid his face on the Grand Pensionary's shoulder.

John de Witt pressed him close.

There was silence in the room save for the scratching of Maria's quill.

Jacob de Witt seated himself in his usual place by the hearth; his hands clasped in his lap. His silver-bound Bible was on the table by his side.

With dim but resolute eyes he looked on at his son and his son's children, and in his heart he gave thanks to God for his noble offspring.

John de Witt was such an one as the pure faith might be proud of; one who had followed in the footsteps of the early members of a stern and persecuted faith; one such as Jacob de Witt would have his son, an upright and humble servant of high things.

Very far away seemed the clamour of the factions, the rumours of wars, the jealousies, the ambitions, the heat of politics; very far from this peaceful home of John de Witt.

Neither did it seem possible that hate or malice should enter here, that lies or calumny, or any ignoble passions, should strike at such goodness and such innocence.

The vilest must love John de Witt, the meanest respect him in his simple, bereaved, and united home.

His helpless children were not more spotless, more free of dishonour, than he who for twenty years had guided a great nation through a difficult and perilous way.

And how are they rewarding him? thought Jacob de Witt grimly. How are they rewarding him?

Into the gathered peace and silence came a distant, ominous sound.

The Grand Pensionary listened.

The noise grew.

He put down his little son and rose.

"What is that?"

Agneta shuddered.

"Another riot——"

"Close the window," said John de Witt; "close the window."

CHAPTER III

SCHEVENINGEN

THE Prince drew rein at the Palace steps.

"Bromley," he said.

The Englishman came down to his master's stirrup.

"Is M. Fagel here?"

"Yes, Highness; he is waiting for you."

"Ah!" William patted his horse's neck.

"Hath he come from the Assembly?"

"Yes, Highness—Their Noble Mightinesses sat all night."

"I trust that they have come to a wise decision," remarked the Prince. "And, Bromley, have you discovered the whereabouts of M. Triglandt?"

"Highness, I wrote to Utrecht——"

"I wrote there," interrupted William impatiently, "and my letter was returned, as M. Triglandt had left his lodgings."

"Highness, I have discovered that he fell ill——"

"Ill!" exclaimed the Prince.

"—and was conveyed by relatives to Arnheim——"

"Well, you will write there and give him my commands to return to the Hague."

William flung the reins to his groom and dismounted.

"You may add," he continued, "that I take the first occasion to ask his return, and that any friend of mine is honoured in the Hague now."

He smiled with his eyes and touched Mr. Bromley on the arm with his whip.

"Tell them to keep the horse, as afterwards I am promised at the 'Huis ten Bosch.'"

Then he turned slowly into the house.

M. Gaspard Fagel, a man of talents but a servile spirit, the rival of M. de Witt, and already almost completely under the influence of the Prince, waited in the library, or the chamber that served for such; the room where Van Mander had first seen the Prince, and where William always received such as waited on him.

The Prince entered, booted, spurred, carrying his riding-whip and wearing his hat.

"Ah, M. Fagel."

He held out his bare right hand, and the Secretary of the Republic kissed it humbly.

William did not uncover, but his manner was gracious. He knew Gaspard Fagel for what he was—able, industrious, cunning, a man who would be a tool.

It was men just such as he that William needed. There were many of them among the servants of the Republic, and very few had resisted the advances of the heir of Nassau.

"I must congratulate you personally on your appointment, M. Fagel," said the Prince, seating himself in front of the desk, between the windows.

"Your Highness is very good," and M. Fagel bowed. He was a well-looking man, richly dressed in green and gold, of a far more pompous appearance than William, who wore a plain brown roquelaure and beaver.

"You come from the Assembly, Mynheer?"

"Yes, Highness—to report to you privately the resolution that will be made public to-day."

"Will you not be seated, Mynheer?"

M. Fagel obeyed, and fixed his small, intelligent eyes keenly and half anxiously on the Prince.

The early morning sunshine was pale and misty in the chamber. William sat with his back to the light, his hat and heavy feather shading his face, so that the astute Secretary could very ill see his countenance.

"There has been a most fierce fight in the Assembly, Highness—M. de Witt exerted every nerve, and the whole

power of the Government was brought to bear on the situation."

"But I believe my friends were in the majority, Mynheer," answered William.

"It was an almost equal struggle, Highness. M. de Witt spoke for two hours against your appointment; M. Jacob de Witt vehemently seconded him, M. Vivien supported them, and they found allies in the representatives of Amsterdam."

William bent his whip across his knee; the powerful city had always been the enemy of his House.

M. Fagel wiped his brow and his lips; he had been up all night, and looked excited and fatigued.

"What was the result of this debate?" asked the Prince quietly.

The Secretary crushed his handkerchief up in his nervous right hand.

"It has been decided to offer Your Highness the Captain Generalship——"

"Without restrictions, Mynheer?"

"That was impossible—we had to come to a compromise with M. de Witt."

The Prince's grasp tightened on his whip.

"What compromise, Mynheer?"

M. Fagel, whose one object was to obtain the favour of the head of the Orange party, winced at the tone of this question.

"Your Highness must consider——" he began.

William cut him short.

"Tell me straightly, M. Fagel."

The Secretary bit his lip uneasily.

"We have obtained for Your Highness, on condition that you take the oaths never to attempt the Stadtholdership——"

"M. Van Odyk told me of that precaution of M. de Witt—I have no objection, Mynheer. He who binds can loose."

"On this condition, and provided war is declared, Their Noble Mightinesses will offer you the Captain Generalship for one campaign, with option to continue the appointment or no at their discretion."

"For one campaign——" repeated William.

"It was all, Highness, that our utmost endeavours could obtain." M. Fagel spoke with humility.

William rose abruptly.

"Their Noble Mightinesses may spare themselves this offer, Mynheer," he said hotly, "for I shall refuse the post."

"Your Highness!"

The Prince turned on him, the whip clenched in his right hand.

"Unless the appointment is made for life I shall refuse it; and I marvel, Mynheer, that you should come to me with so paltry a compromise."

"Your Highness will not be wise to reject it—your firmness will only further anger M. de Witt, who was with difficulty brought to this concession."

"If you permit the Assembly to make this offer it will be declined," returned William haughtily. "You may tell my friends so—I will not be put on trial nor be satisfied with such a poor honour."

M. Fagel saw in this a proud indiscretion of youth. The dignity that the Prince despised had been wrung from John de Witt with much labour; to refuse it, M. Fagel, a man of cautious policy, thought unwise and dangerous.

"Your Highness will think of this——"

William interrupted—

"My decision is made, M. Fagel. I shall not depart from it."

The Secretary ventured to protest—

"The advice of your friends——"

"No one's advice, Mynheer, would alter my resolution."

M. Fagel was twice the Prince's age, and an experienced statesman; but he was dominated by William utterly. John de Witt and some few others were alone in coming in contact with the Prince and escaping his powerful, masterful influence. M. Fagel, a man in every way his inferior, he almost openly despised.

"There is not a man in the United Provinces does not

desire my election," he said. "The people are with me—Their High Mightinesses had better beware. Tell the Assembly no compromise will be accepted—none."

He was breathing fast and with difficulty; it was obvious that he was unusually angry and unusually near to losing his self-control. He coughed, and took a quick turn about the room holding his hand to his side.

"I am sorry that we have disappointed Your Highness," said M. Fagel, already stung into regretting that he and his party had been induced into giving way to the opposition of M. de Witt.

"Go back and do better," answered William, with a flashing glance. "Are you afraid of M. the Grand Pensionary and his supporters? I have the people—you, and John de Witt, had best remember it——"

"I did what I could to serve Your Highness."

"What you could?—when you bring this to me!"

M. Fagel strove to justify himself. The Prince silenced him haughtily.

"Is this a moment to show timidity—when M. de Witt carries it with a firm front? If you had not given way he had been forced to—I have both General Wurtz and Prince Charles, Prince John Maurice and de Ruyter on my side."

M. Fagel could not forget that John de Witt was still the head of the Government.

"A compromise——" he began.

His smooth voice and the word he used stung the Prince into a rare exhibition of temper. He turned violently, with dark, fierce eyes and the whip bent double in his hand.

"Be damned to your compromise!" he cried. "John de Witt and the chaffering tradesmen who support him will have the French across the Rhine before the army is under canvas. I'll have none of your cursed 'ifs' or 'buts'—'tis all—or they save themselves."

He snatched up his glove from where he had flung it on his entry.

"That is my answer, M. Fagel," he said passionately, "and

any remonstrance on the matter I shall consider an insult."

The Secretary bowed.

He knew what de Pomponne had discovered, that the Prince was "tolerably firm and tolerably positive, and once he hath taken his resolution to argue with him is waste breath."

He was aware, also, that what William wished he began to obtain, and that the expression "the country is with me" was no figment of speech.

The United Provinces were behind William of Orange, and to the rising power the prudent statesman made his court.

He already had learnt something of the character of the Prince he intended to serve, already guessed at something of the imperious passion behind the contained exterior.

Now he had proof of it, and it spurred and stimulated him. He bore not the least ill-will to William for his anger. It seemed that the Prince was one of those who are served and beloved without effort on their part. M. Fagel was more eager than ever to please him; in common with many others, the chance of William's taciturn thanks was more to him than the certainty of M. de Witt's courteous graciousness.

"We will do our best, Highness," he said, rising from his chair.

William gave him a not wholly pleasant glance.

"Reflect on what I have said, M. Fagel," he answered haughtily.

With that he flung open the door and was gone.

Mr. Bromley, waiting in the doorway in case his attendance was required, fell back at once before the sight of his master's face as the Prince swept out into the sunlight.

The groom brought up the grey horse.

"Shall I accompany Your Highness?" ventured Mr. Bromley.

"No—I am not going to the 'Huis ten bosch.'"

The Prince sprang into the saddle and caught up the reins.

Matthew Bromley, who knew him as well as any man was permitted to, saw that he was in a passionate ill-humour.

"See M. Fagel out of the house—and get out of the way, Bromley."

The horse, mettlesome and fierce, like all the Prince's animals, had grown restive with waiting, and tossed his head impatiently. But William held him in with an ease that betrayed a good deal of strength behind his delicate appearance.

"Stand out of the way," he repeated, addressing Mr. Bromley and the groom.

"Is Your Highness going alone?"

The Prince thrust his whip under his arm and scowled at the speaker in a fashion that warned Mr. Bromley to be silent.

But the Englishman, disturbed at this rare passion on his master's part, persisted—

"Where are you going, Sir ; is there no message?"

William turned in the saddle to look at him.

"I have allowed you too much license," he said violently, "but, by God ! I am master among my own servants."

Matthew Bromley stepped back and the Prince let the horse go ; it sprang forward, and William disappeared through the Palace gates.

Without troubling where he went he turned towards the outskirts of the town, with the one idea of avoiding the people. He was fast becoming a popular hero, but he never loved the crowd save in the abstract. All public display of affection was distasteful to him ; and to-day he was too roused and angry to risk the chance of meeting either M. de Witt or any member of the Assembly.

He had been defeated, bitterly disappointed. He was well used to taking both defeat and disappointment, but this time his passion had slipped his control. His bitter indignation against M. de Witt must find some vent . . . if it were only a fierce gallop out of the Hague.

He found himself on the klinker paved road, edged with a double row of straight trees. It led to Scheveningen, and with a quick memory of the sea he turned towards the

coast. The hour was still early, and a frail sunshine quivered in the foliage and over the meadow-land that stretched either side the road.

Through the blue haze of the damp morning rose the tall, dark forms of windmills, with still sails poised against the delicate sky and the clean brickwork of farms, green shuttered and ornamented with lines of white; the black and white cattle, carefully covered with brown coats, were grazing in the long, rich, fresh grass; here and there a villa stood back among the trees with painted shutters open on treasures from the East—a glowing carpet, a Chinese bowl, or a gaudy Macaw chattering in an ebony ring.

The Prince slackened his pace.

Everything about him showed wealth, peace, and complete prosperity . . . the great dangers looming on land and sea cast no shadow here . . .

Here was a country to be given to the conqueror; here was a rich and fertile kingdom for the insolent French to batten on . . .

William gazed round with absorbed and resolute eyes as his horse's hoofs rang out on the klinkers in slackened beat.

There were few people abroad, and the Prince, being unattended and attired like an ordinary gentleman, escaped notice; this fact, and the novel sense of absolute freedom, served to dispel his ill-humour.

He had been solitary of soul all his life, and so used to loneliness that he did not give it a name. But he had always been surrounded by enemies, watched, spied upon, and forced to weigh every word and every look; this sheer liberty of solitude was pleasant as it was new.

He cleared the houses and the trees and came out on to the dunes, low sand hillocks grown with scant poplar shrubs.

Avoiding the village of Scheveningen, the Prince took the winding road that led direct to the sea.

After a while the shrubs ceased and there was no growing thing—only the low, rolling billows of dry white sand pierced with withered and broken reeds. William rode slowly along

the diminishing road, and cresting a sandy ridge came in sight of the immense stretch of quiet grey sea breaking in a curling line of foam on the desolate shore.

To his right, only a few yards above high-tide mark, stood a small church with a blue-and-red tiled roof.

The steps were half buried in sand, and up to the very door the gaily painted fishing-boats were drawn.

Behind and beyond were the dunes, broken only by the few houses of Scheveningen to the left.

The Prince drew a deep breath of pleasure at the pure salt air, at the quiet dunes and the misty sea, whose waves broke regularly with a strong, falling sound.

He guided his horse over the shifting sand towards the church, and as he neared it his keen glance perceived an old man seated on the edge of one of the boats mending tawny nets.

A great flight of sea-birds, graceful, chattering, a strong, flashing white in the pale sunshine, rose up as the horseman disturbed their solitude, and flew out across the waveless sea.

The fisher was roused too by the unusual sound of jingling harness.

He looked up, and seeing a gentleman riding slowly across the sand, the while he gazed thoughtfully out to sea, he dropped his net and stared. He was used to gentlefolk from the Hague—but not so early in the year as this.

The horse William rode was magnificent, of a Flemish breed, a stone grey and shining like polished granite; he wore the least possible harness, and his full, intelligent eyes were uncovered; he arched his neck and trod daintily into the sand that shifted under his hoofs.

The fisherman stared stolidly at the horse, then lifted his eyes to the rider.

He beheld a slight young man in a brown greatcoat and a rough beaver with a black feather, black velvet breeches and waistcoat, top-boots, and a plain cravat of Frisian needlework.

His face was turned towards the sea, and only his heavy auburn hair was visible under his broad-leaved hat.

The fisherman turned his attention again to the horse, as the more interesting of the two.

Then suddenly the Prince turned and looked at him.

The fisherman doffed his cap.

"Good morning, Mynheer."

"Good morning," answered the Prince, and swerved the horse towards the fishing-boats and the church.

"We have no wind to-day," said the fisherman, picking up his net.

"No." William was observing him.

He was a stout, red-faced man, clad in huge dark blue breeches, a striped turquoise coloured shirt, woollen hose, heavy wooden sabots, and a round red cap.

His throat was covered by an emerald green scarf; he held a thick pipe between his lips, and on a finger of his left hand shone a large gold ring.

He surveyed the Prince with a calm curiosity.

"We do not see many strangers at Scheveningen," he remarked, "as early as this."

"No," the Prince assented. "Yet it is very pleasant here."

"Have you come from the town, Mynheer?" He indicated the Hague by a jerk of his thumb over his shoulder.

"Even so."

"I was up there—last Sunday."

William said nothing, but he did not look forbidding.

"There was a riot," continued the fisherman, with a kind of reserved interest.

"There often is."

"It was outside the Stadhuis."

"I heard of it."

"The people were shouting against M. de Witt."

"It is not uncommon."

The fisherman looked up from his net.

"Are you a soldier, Mynheer?"

"At present I am merely a private citizen ; but I think I shall some day be a soldier."

The man shifted his pipe between his teeth.

"If there is war, Mynheer?"

"Yes, if there is war."

The fisherman nodded approvingly.

"We shall all need to be soldiers if we want to keep the French out, Mynheer."

William delicately guided his horse a little nearer.

"I should like to go into the church."

"Well, it is open, Mynheer."

At this the Prince dismounted.

"Where can I secure my horse?" he asked.

"There is a house behind the church——"

"Deserted, it seems."

"*He* was killed under de Ruyter, and his wife died last year"—the fisherman gave slow information. "A youngster from the Hague has it now, but you can fasten up your horse to the door-post."

William gave grave thanks, and led the horse across the sloping sand hillocks and secured him carefully to one of the stakes comprising the broken fencing that surrounded the closed house.

When he returned the fisherman had bent over his work as if he had forgotten him.

But the Prince did not enter the church ; he came and stood with one hand resting on the long fishing-boat, his eyes fixed on the sea.

The early sunlight had already faded.

A pale mist blew off the water and hurried across the land ; the great expanse was bounded by the curtain of vapour and the little village blotted out of sight.

Shore and ocean were grey together, divided only by the white, breaking line of the surf murmuring on the beach.

Vague and endless the sand dunes stretched against the sky pierced with the straight clusters of reeds, dry and gaunt.

The large, white sea-birds flew out of the curling fog and settled along the wet line of shining sand the retreating foam left bare.

The fisherman turned a heavy gaze on the motionless figure of the stranger.

"You are new to the Hague?"

"No, I have lived there all my life."

"What brings you to Scheveningen, Mynheer?"

The man spoke sullenly, almost as if he resented the intrusion.

William turned.

"I wished to see—that."

He pointed to the quiet ocean.

The Netherlander nodded; it was a feeling he could understand.

"Also," added William, "I was in an ill-humour and came here to be rid of it."

"It is quiet enough."

"Yes."

They were both so used to the mist that they scarcely noticed it.

"Will the boats go abroad to-day?" asked the Prince.

"There is no wind."

The net gathered in a great heap at the fisherman's feet as his long needle flew over the meshes; he moved, and the dried seaweed crackled under his sabots.

"I saw de Ruyter's fleet go past—when I was on my herring boat—two days ago . . . great ships . . . I thought the lanterns on the masts were stars."

"They are under weigh to meet the India fleet," answered the Prince.

"Ay, they say the English are waiting to drop on us—because of the herring fisheries too. Do you believe that, Mynheer?"

William seated himself on the end of the boat.

"I do," he answered briefly.

An intent look came into the old man's face that was cut

and seamed like a walnut-shell and the colour of bronze above his vivid scarf.

"You think there will be war?"

"I do," said William again.

"With France?"

"And England."

The fisherman's eyes, that were still a bright blue, narrowed to slits of light.

"De Ruyter beat the English once—I remember it—when they brought home the *Royal Charles*."

"That is what they would make us pay for now."

"M. de Witt is for peace."

William bent his whip across his knee.

"Nevertheless I think it will be war . . . the French are on the frontier."

"Curse M. de Witt!"

The Prince looked at the man sharply.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he would sell us all to the French."

William smiled scornfully.

"I thought it was the Prince of Orange of whom they said that——"

"The Prince!—it is the Prince of Orange who will save us."

William slightly flushed.

"You think so?" he asked softly.

"Ay, I know it, Mynheer."

The answer was given with simple, unconscious confidence, and the Prince's colour deepened.

"I am not the only one who thinks so either," continued the fisherman, taking out his pipe; "it is the thought of all the Netherlands."

"Yet you know nothing of William of Orange."

"He has had no chance . . . M. de Witt's prisoner . . . but now M. de Witt will go."

William looked at the ever changing, never ending line of surf. He was now pale, even to the lips, and was so long silent that it seemed suspicious to the other.

"Perhaps you are one of the Grand Pensionary's men," he suggested, with an accent of dislike.

"I am no friend to John de Witt."

The fisherman chuckled, relieved.

"I think he has not many friends left now."

"The Assembly support him," answered William slowly.

"And the people support the Prince . . . let him ask for anything we will give it him."

William turned his brilliant eyes on the speaker.

"Why are you so devoted to His Highness?" he asked.

The fisherman reflected; he seemed puzzled.

"I know not—he is William of Orange," he answered at last.

"You would trust him with the Captain Generalship——?"

"With everything—by God, I would! we are tired of M. de Witt."

The Prince coughed and made no answer.

Knocking the ashes out of his pipe, the fisherman spoke again—

"He has kept the Prince out of his inheritance for twenty years."

"'Tis so," said William quietly.

"Well, now he is going to pay for it."

"You think so?"

"Wait and see, Mynheer"

William smiled.

"I have been waiting to see—for a long while."

"Then you are for the Prince too;" the fisherman expressed a stolid satisfaction.

"I am for my country," replied William evasively, "and that is a bigger question. . . . It is not the Grand Pensionary or the Prince . . . but our freedom or our downfall."

"William of Orange will save us," repeated the fisherman.

William smiled, half bitterly.

"I wonder."

The other was roused to argument.

"That has been said to me before—it was by Heinrich

Potts—'Your Prince has never heard a shot nor been under canvas,' he said—'and he has no strength to live through one campaign.'"

He paused.

William looked down at him as he methodically refilled his pipe.

"Well?—the first is true—the second well may prove so."

"I answered nothing to that—but he added—'Your Prince is in league with his uncle—why not?—and the King of France. If we give him the power, he'll sell us all to them.'"

"I have heard that before," said William slowly, looking out to sea.

"Well, Mynheer, I never believed it—but Potts said, 'Why not?' . . . and I emptied his tankard in his face. . . . He said M. de Witt was a good man."

"I think he is," commented William dryly.

"But you are for the Prince?" urged the fisherman. "He will save us from M. de Witt and from the French," he added.

There was a pause, then the old Netherlander began anew—

"They say the Prince of Tarentum pays court to him, and wants him to marry his daughter. Do you think that is true?"

"M. de Tarentum flies too high; I do not think the Prince will marry a subject."

"I am glad of it."

He looked up shrewdly into the young man's face.

"You are from the Hague, you will know something of affairs——"

He paused.

"Do you know anything of the Prince?" he asked at length.

William turned his head away. "A little."

The fisherman spread his huge brown hands on his knees.

"What do you think he will do, Mynheer?—in the matter of the war?"

"You believe in him, you say?"

"Ay, I do . . . to hell with M. de Witt!"

"Then, believing in him, ye know well what he will do."

"Defy the French?"

William kept his gaze upon the sea.

"That would be madness, they say."

"Defy them—that is what the Prince will do, I swear to ye, Mynheer!"

With that he tilted his head a little and watched the long wreaths of blue smoke disappear into the misty air.

William was silent, slightly frowning; his expression was thoughtful, as if he considered weighty matters.

The mist seemed to gather and deepen; it broke against the old church and hurried away across the sand dunes, blotting them out.

A little sound like a satisfied sigh, repeated once or twice, came from somewhere near the Prince. He looked round, and saw in the bottom of the boat against which he leaned a large and gaily dressed child, sitting up and rubbing its eyes.

Conscious in a moment of the gaze turned on it, with surprising rapidity it scrambled out of the boat and shook out voluminous skirts.

It wore a tight bodice worked with yellow and red roses, striped sleeves of blue and white, and enormous skirts of a bright green colour that stuck out as if the little person had been thrust through a half apple.

A close lace cap was drawn over its head, and from under it hung long, pale yellow curls, framing a smooth, expressionless face of rosy brown with large china-blue eyes.

The fisherman gave it a stolid nod.

William turned on it the remote but curious gaze of youth surveying infancy.

"Is it a boy?" he asked.

"My grandson, Mynheer."

The fisherman pointed out in the back of the baby's cap the coloured button that showed its sex.

"He has been asleep in the boat . . . he sleeps all day."

The baby collapsed rather than sat down on the wreaths of dry seaweed and stared stolidly at the Prince.

A couple of screaming sea-birds started up from the mist-drenched land and flew out across the grey depths of shrouded sea.

"The wind is getting up," remarked the fisherman. "The boats will be able to put out to-night."

William took no notice, he seemed absorbed in his own thoughts.

"Tell me what you think the Prince will do," urged the fisherman, who was beginning to feel some awe of the stranger. "What kind of a man is he?" he added, jerking the nets across his knee.

The baby staggered to its feet, shaking a coral and silver ornament depending from its waist; it fell at once on its face, with an unchanged expression rose again and clutched at the Prince's hand to steady itself.

"He wants to get into the boat again," said William respectfully.

The baby blinked up at him and kept a tight grasp on his glove.

The Prince deferred to the grandfather as to what line of action was to be taken with this novelty.

"Shall I put him into the boat again?" he asked.

"Nay, Mynheer, let him be—he sleeps too much, that is why he is so fat."

"I like him," said William gravely. "I have never seen a child so close before."

The fisherman was not enthusiastic; he returned to his point.

"What can you tell me of the Prince, Mynheer?"

William gave him an intent look.

"What can I tell you of the Prince of Orange?"

His gaze fastened itself once more on the line of surf, ever falling, ever renewed; his manner dropped into an absorption.

"He had an unhappy childhood," he said—"I think so. . . . He was a prisoner . . . and he had high desires . . . also he was weakly, ill-health made his days a burden to

him . . . he knew always that he could not live at the utmost to more than middle life. . . . Well, his life had been maimed for him before he was born . . . and with the loneliness and the humiliation, and the long hours of pain, he was sometimes near despair . . . but God supported him . . . I believed, always—— . . . What was I saying? . . . He believed in predestination . . . so I think ; . . . that God had set him apart, made him so different from other men, because He had an especial mission for him . . . the protection of the Church of the Reformed Religion . . . he believed in that always . . . and he hated the French and the Romish Faith . . . and he loved his country."

The speaker's voice fell very low.

"I can say this for him . . . that while he draws his breath—such as these," he looked down at the little child, "shall not inherit slavery . . . the Netherlands shall own no second Alva . . ."

The fisherman sat silent.

"That is all I know of the Prince of Orange," added William. "As yet he hath had no chance . . . no chance to prove himself."

"Ye know him very well," said the old man after a weighty pause. "And I am sure that he is even as you say. A second Alva! King Louis would be a second Philip—but we have still a William of Orange."

The baby had dropped to the sand again, and the Prince rose, turned, and without further word entered the humble church.

For a moment he stood at the door, looking at the white-washed interior, the stiff wooden pews, the tablets to the memory of sailors, and the little brass models of ships that hung from the rafters; thank-offerings from those who had escaped dire perils at sea.

In his ears was the perpetual roar of the waves, and in his nostrils the salt breeze of the ocean.

After a while he returned to the boats and walked up and down thoughtfully.

‘The youngsters will be coming to the farm,” remarked the fisherman. “They have a printing press there.”

“Ah, who are they?” asked the Prince sharply.

“Young men from the Hague—Orangists—they print pamphlets against M. de Witt—I know it—they composed that last, *Advice to every Faithful Hollander*—they talk big too—Jouner Van der Graef is one—and his father a magistrate!”

The child was crawling round the edge of the boat; it lifted a grave face to the Prince, who stooped and picked it up.

Twenty-five years or so afterwards, when a great king who had broken the power of France, freed England, and formed one of the hugest coalitions the world has known, famous as a statesman, glorious as a soldier, died in a palace very far from Scheveningen—his life-work done, a young fisherman amid the grief of Holland recalled with awe that William of Orange had once held him in his arms . . .

William placed him gently in the boat, then turned rather sharply.

“What is that?” he asked.

Through the rise and fall of the surf might be distinctly heard the sound of approaching people, talking, and even laughing, as if they had lost their way in the mist.

“The Jouner Van der Graef and his companions,” said the fisherman.

“They are coming here?”

“As I said, Mynheer.”

The Prince hastened to loosen his horse and to remount, but as he leapt to the saddle several figures emerged out of the fog.

William turned the grey horse away from Scheveningen towards the undulating, obscure lines of the sand dunes.

But they had seen him.

“A stranger!” cried the foremost.

The Prince gave a glance at him over his shoulder.

“Ah!” Jacob Van der Graef caught his breath and fell back a pace.

The Prince put spurs to his horse and galloped away along the dunes ; in a moment he was a mere shadowy shape against the sea fog.

Jacob Van der Graef ran down the beach to where the old fisherman sat.

"The Prince of Orange !" he cried excitedly. "What was he doing here? . . ."

William, riding through the grey loneliness, was thinking of these hot-head conspirators.

"They are fools," he said. "But there are times when fools may be useful."

CHAPTER IV

THE DEFEAT OF M. DE WITT

MATTHEW BROMLEY was summoned to the great, formal audience chamber of the Palace. It was twilight, and the Prince not yet returned.

In the Palace and in the Hague a great excitement loomed and gathered. The Assembly had sat all day; fearful rumours were current as to the safety of the India fleet and the reason of de Ruyter's silence.

Mr. Bromley carried a copy of *The Gazette*, as he entered the room where the two gentlemen waited for His Highness.

By the feeble candlelight that but faintly dispelled the lowering shadows he saw them; one Florent Van Mander, the other a fair and handsome gentleman, young, and very elegantly attired in a grey velvet and silver riding suit.

"Ah, Mr. Bromley, have you quite forgotten me?" The newcomer rose and held out his hand.

The Englishman was genuinely pleased.

"M. Bentinck!"

"At last!—returned from exile as you see. Where is His Highness? Abroad they tell me."

"Abroad certainly—where, I do not know."

M. Bentinck raised his brows.

"Does no one know?"

Mr. Bromley nodded at Van Mander.

"Sir, M. Fagel came to see His Highness this morning—and afterwards the Prince left the house in a passion."

"Alone?" M. Bentinck looked considerably surprised.

"Alone."

"He is no longer under any supervision?"

"None at all now, sir. M. de Witt has had to cede his authority little by little, till he has none left——"

"In all the United Provinces, I think," smiled M. Bentinck. "Oh, Mynheer, I am tired, I have lain sick a week at Hertogenbosch."

He seated himself in one of the heavy leather chairs, and his gay face and rich clothes made a brightness in the large and sombre chamber.

"Shall I not order dinner for you?" asked Mr. Bromley.

"No—I thank you, we dined on the road."

Florent retained his seat by the window, composed and grave, pulling at his hat and feather that he held across his knee; his taciturnity seemed to absolve the others from the unusual in leaving him out of their conversation.

"How goes His Highness' affair in the Assembly?" asked M. Bentinck.

"It was concerning that M. Fagel came this morning——"

"M. Fagel has turned courtier?"

"As have some others—yes!"

M. Bentinck leant back in his chair. His attractive face was thoughtful; he fingered the ribbon on his velvet cuff.

"We received garbled reports in Brandenburg—what do you think, Mr. Bromley, of the chances of war?"

The Englishman shrugged his shoulders.

"De Pomponne hath been withdrawn and no other sent—in spite of M. de Witt's representations. No concession will pacify King Louis——"

"He cannot forgive the Triple Alliance."

"No—and some other things—the medal and Van Beuningen's embassy."

M. Bentinck lifted his blue eyes—

"And the English?"

Matthew Bromley laughed.

"Well, they say the English are as insolent as the French. Temple was recalled and Sir George Downing sent—to provoke a war, I truly think. You heard of the Treaty of Dover?—well,

King Charles protests love to His Highness always, but hates the States. . . . I am not a soldier nor a diplomat . . . if war is declared I shall go home."

"Leave the Prince's service?"

"I am English," said Matthew Bromley lightly. He went to the mantelshelf and snuffed the candles.

M. Bentinck frowned.

"The English people—the English Parliament are not friendly to the French."

Mr. Bromley agreed heartily.

"It is solely Charles Stewart." Then he laughed again. Did you hear of the *Merlin*?"

"Sir William's yacht, was it not?"

"Yes; taking Lady Temple home the yacht passed through your fleet and demanded the salute—fired on your flag—captain told to, of course; is in the Tower now for not doing more—what does that look like but war?"

"The pretexts are utterly wanton and frivolous," remarked M. Bentinck.

"M. de Witt hath ceded the salute of the flag."

The young Dutch noble flushed swiftly.

"Doth he still hope to obtain peace?"

Mr. Bromley shrugged his shoulders.

"Downing made some impossible demands—he is a ruffler sent to cause friction, of course. I should say his secret orders were to provoke a war by any means."

He paused, then added with meaning—

"But both the Kings protest friendship to His Highness—his uncle saith one of his grievances against the Republic is that the Prince hath been kept so long out of his offices."

M. Bentinck rose.

"You think His Highness and his friends are safe enough," he said quietly.

"Yes—but I would not give much for the safety of M. de Witt."

As he spoke the door was flung wide and the Prince entered with an unusual impetuosity.

Van Mander, unnoticed by all, rose to his feet in the shadows of the window.

"Bentinck!" exclaimed William; he dashed his hat down on a chair inside the door. "Bentinck!"

"Your Highness!"

The young man sank to one knee and kissed the Prince's hands.

William raised him.

"You are well?—you have recovered?" he asked eagerly.

"Completely—to see the Hague and you again, Highness, would have cured me had I been far sicker."

William gazed intently into the fair, ardent face.

"You must come upstairs with me—how dark and cold it is here——"

He looked round and saw Matthew Bromley standing by the mantelshelf.

At once he crossed over to him.

"Bromley, I spoke violently to you this morning," he said, "and I am sorry—will you forgive me?"

It was William's habit to make instant reparation for his rare outbursts of passion, but Mr. Bromley had not expected he would ask pardon of his own gentleman.

"M. Fagel vexed me," continued the Prince. "I had no fault to find with you."

Mr. Bromley coloured and stood in a foolish confusion.

William offered his hand with the graceful courtesy he knew so well how to use.

Mr. Bromley flushed more deeply with gratification and pleasure.

"It was nothing—Your Highness," he protested, and the Prince had secured a lifelong devotion.

It did not occur to Mr. Bromley to call his master's graciousness policy, the obvious sincerity of William's rare advances was what gave them their value.

He was above any arts, making no efforts to gain supporters. There were already men who would have died for his praise and performed heroic feats to avoid his blame.

He smiled at Mr. Bromley and caught M. Bentinck by the arm.

"Highness, I return in the midst of great events."

William turned the smile on him and drew him from the room.

M. Bentinck adored the Prince, not more so than many, not more so perhaps than Florent Van Mander, standing unnoticed, unthought of, but William had chosen to bestow on him his friendship.

William Bentinck was intelligent; he had always been blindly loyal to the House of Nassau. He was of a rare good looks and attractiveness, and had been the Prince's page when they were children. William admitted him to his closest confidence, and was more open with him than with any; none knowing better, however, than William Bentinck, that in any serious matter he had not the slightest influence with his master.

The Prince would do anything to please him in trivial affairs; but he was his own counsellor, those associated with him were no more than the lieutenants of his will.

Without words this was understood between them. Bentinck offered neither advice nor criticism.

His first words when they were alone were characteristic—

"What are you going to do, Highness? In what way can I help you?" he asked eagerly.

William looked at him as if the sight of his glowing handsomeness was a pleasure.

The smile was still on his lips; it seemed as if he would not be drawn into serious questions. His attitude was rather like that of a man to a woman whom he loves but must always with a half laugh condescend to when it concerns the discussion of large issues.

"Tell me of your journey—and sickness," he said. "You have changed very little," he added, with a deepening of his smile.

"And you have changed a great deal," replied Bentinck, gazing at him eagerly.

"Do you think so?"

They had reached the quiet library; the Prince sat

beside his friend on an oak settle that stood against the wall.

The room was golden from end to end with the light of candles and a silver lamp placed on the desk, where it cast a strong glow over a bowl of orange and purple tulips. The curtains were not drawn, and each of the long windows framed a picture of blue twilight, trees, and sky.

"What of M. de Witt?" asked Bentinck. "It seems to me he cannot long keep the power—every village I rode through seethed with discontent."

"Tell me of yourself, my lord," urged William affectionately. "I have been without friends so long."

"Of myself! You jest, Highness—I, an exile, newly returned to the theatre of great events!"

William sighed.

"There is very little to tell you . . . there will be war, of course."

"And the Captain Generalship?"

"M. Fagel was here this morning to offer it to me—for one campaign."

"And you?"

William smiled anew into the young man's comely, ardent face; now with a half mournful air.

"I refused."

"Unconditionally?"

"Yes."

"My faith!" cried M. Bentinck, "that was a bold move, Highness."

"I think it will prove a successful one."

William spoke as if he explained himself from a pure effort of friendship, and would have preferred to talk of other things.

"M. de Witt was at the back of that."

"Of course."

"Who are his men?"

"Prince John Maurice, Prince Charles, Major-General Wurtz—and M. de Montbas."

"None of them his friends—save the last."

"No. I have their promise not to accept the post, if it be offered them—the promise of the first three, I mean."

"And Prince Charles' daughter?"

William looked at him keenly.

"Who told you that?"

"The Elector spoke to me of it—said Prince Charles would be pleased to make an alliance on those terms."

"They are too high," answered the Prince. "Think no more of it—I have refused."

"And the French match?"

William unexpectedly coloured.

"King Louis wished a French Princess to seal his friendship—did he not?" continued M. Bentinck.

The Prince rose, coughing a little, and crossed to the hearth.

"The French Ambassador at Berlin told me so much——"

William answered sternly—

"No doubt my cousin Louis thought it a great honour . . . I told M. de Pomponne that my House was used to contract alliances with royalty—I do not wish to quarter the bend sinister with my coat."

"King Louis will never forgive that."

"He protests he is my very good friend . . . he thinks he may have use for me. . . . This war, if it please you, is largely on my behalf . . . to punish the ingratitude of the Republic."

William walked up and down the hearth. He still wore his roquelaure, and clasped his hands behind him under the full skirts.

"Whatever he may say he will never forgive that," repeated M. Bentinck.

"It is I who will never forgive," said William, "that he should so have mistaken how I rate myself."

"Well, and there will be war?" flashed the other, leaning forward.

"This spring, I think. . . . The prettexts are utterly wanton—you heard of the *Merlin* incident?"

"Some account, yes."

"And my uncle Charles has sent one Downing over, an

insupportable swashbuckler. Temple was a good fellow, and friendly, therefore he was removed."

"It will be England too, you think?"

"Yes; but I have hopes of my uncle Charles."

Then William turned to face his companion.

"Did you hear of their complaints?" he asked in an amused tone. "My uncle protests that the *Royal Charles*, decked with English flags, was shown for a penny a head to gaping boors, thereupon M. de Witt sends the flags back and withdraws the ship——"

"A poor-spirited move!" cried M. Bentinck.

"As if my uncle was a man to care for his country's prestige! Then it was His Christian Majesty—he complains that Van Beuningen after his return from the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle was presented with a medal making mock of His Majesty."

William, never devoid of humour, laughed outright, showing his white teeth in genuine amusement.

"The noble city of Amsterdam was accused of this—'Nec pluribus impar' is His Majesty's motto, and they had a presentment of King Sun with his rays clipped, and this inscription, 'In conspectu meo stelit sol.' There were other offences too; pamphlets printed at the Hague insulting the omnipotent. Poor M. de Witt and Van Beuningen have been rushing to and fro trying to appease the offended deity."

He added in a graver tone—

"But of course Louvois is behind it—he is jealous of our commerce."

"M. de Witt, I take it, still hopes for peace?"

"Even M. de Witt," answered William, "will not be able to indulge that hope much longer, I think."

He rested his elbow against the mantelshelf and took his face in his hand; the candlelight fell softly on his thick bright hair and sparkled in the green ring on his little finger.

M. Bentinck sat silent, gazing at his master. He could not quite understand the Prince's attitude.

He had never considered William as one with the United Provinces, but rather as their enemy.

What, therefore, would be his attitude in the forthcoming war?

It was against the Republic the furies of France were directed, not against William of Orange.

In the invasion of his country he might find his own advantage. He was in no way bound to the service of a State that had never placed any confidence in him but had treated him as a prisoner all his life.

His obvious policy lay in a compact with France, but so far he appeared to have rejected such overtures as had been made to him.

"I cannot see clearly how you stand, Highness," said M. Bentinck at last, puzzled.

"No?" In no man's company did the Prince smile so much. "My attitude is rather difficult to define, is it not, my child?"

William was three or four years younger than M. Bentinck, and half a head shorter, but the expression did not sound foolish on his lips.

"How will war help you?" asked M. Bentinck thoughtfully.

The Prince did not seem inclined to answer this.

"I have had a whole day of idleness," he said. "For the first time since—I cannot remember when—I went to Scheveningen—idle but not useless. I encountered an old man there—and a child—his confidence!"

William turned towards the settee.

"They all look to me to save them—does not that seem curious—after all M. de Witt has done?"

M. Bentinck caressed the fine lace at his wrist.

"It is certainly strange M. de Witt should be so disliked," he answered.

"It is his peace policy. Confess, is it not stranger that I should be beloved?"

M. Bentinck smiled.

"I cannot think so, Highness."

"They know nothing of me—they give me the credit of my name."

The Prince turned to the window now and looked out on to the darkening prospect of trees and sky.

"M. de Witt hath opposed me most bitterly in the Assembly," he said. "I think he called me some hard names—an inexperienced boy. Ah! what I have taken from that man, William. M. Jacob de Witt does not forget Loevenstein—nor do I——"

He coughed and abruptly changed the subject.

"Do you remember what they did to the children when Alva had rule here, William? . . . I saw a child to-day, on the sands . . . do you think the French would be more merciful than the Spanish?—their Romish faith! . . . King Louis hopes to celebrate Mass at the Hague . . ."

"If the peace negotiations fail what could one do?" asked M. Bentinck. "We have de Ruyter, but there is no captain to hold the French back on the land."

"One might arise," answered the Prince.

"You think——?"

William cut him short.

"We talk too weightily. I have had no dinner, you must dine again to keep me company. How are my uncle the Elector and my cousin Charlotte?"

M. Bentinck rose.

"It could be a match there, if you wished, Highness. You see there are many courting your alliance."

"I am already adept in the art of saying 'no,'" answered the Prince.

"It would please the Elector and the Princess Dowager—I do not think the lady herself would be averse——"

William frowned.

"It is not even to be considered—my fortunes are too unsettled for me to think of a wife. Ah, here is Bromley."

He turned quickly at his gentleman's entrance.

"A message from the Assembly, Bromley?"

"Yes, Highness."

The Prince took the letter that was offered him and flashed a look at M. Bentinck.

"M. Fagel come to his senses, I believe," he said, and tore the seal.

Mr. Bromley explained.

"The Assembly has just risen, Highness; the messenger came here at once he said—from M. Zuylestein."

A swift colour had come into the Prince's thin cheeks.

"Yes, it is from M. Zuylestein."

He glanced over the letter, then handed it to M. Bentinck.

"Read it, William; it is as I thought it must be."

M. Bentinck cast his eyes over the writing; the ink of it barely dry, the sweeps of the quill blotted in the writer's haste.

"THE BINNENHOF, *Feb. 20, 1672*

"YOUR HIGHNESS,—We have news from de Ruyter that the India fleet was attacked by the English, but by God his grace saved—war is inevitable. Their Noble Mightinesses have appointed you Captain General of the land and sea forces for life. Accept my humble congratulations on this success. I write in haste. Your servant,

"FREDERICK OF NASSAU"

"Then it is done!" cried M. Bentinck. "Highness, I am beyond measure pleased—this is the more a triumph that it hath not been undisputed——"

"It is the attempt on the India fleet hath decided them," returned the Prince. "Only this morning they offered a compromise——"

Then he looked straightly and keenly at Mr. Bromley.

"Your King has attacked M. de Ruyter," he said. "England will declare war on the United Provinces . . . perhaps you would wish to leave my service?"

Matthew Bromley laughed and coloured in a half confusion.

"'Tis a long while since I was home, sir."

"But you are English."

"I am not a Romanist, sir."

"Still an Anglican," said the Prince, as if he considered the one creed almost as offensive as the other, but his eyes were kindly.

Mr. Bromley bowed.

"I serve Your Highness, not the United Provinces," he said, with the air of one who has cut a Gordian knot.

William folded up his uncle's letter.

"The United Provinces have made me Captain General, Bromley—I am in their service now."

"I will stay if Your Highness will have me," was the Englishman's answer. He smiled a little humorously. "England is probably in the wrong," he said; his thought was that William was right—right for ever in Mr. Bromley's eyes after those words to him that evening.

The Prince smiled.

"I am glad to keep you."

"May I give Your Highness my congratulations and good wishes?"

"Thank you, Bromley."

The Englishman withdrew.

"This is something to have wrung from M. de Witt," cried M. Bentinck excitedly. "'Tis a violation of the terms of the Act of Harmony."

"He would have been wiser to have given it," said William slowly. "I begged him to—I was certain of it from the first."

With a little cough he moved to the mantelshelf again. He seemed in no way elated or moved, weary rather. He fell again into the reserved silence M. Bentinck's home-coming had dispelled, and looked in an absorbed and thoughtful manner on the ground.

His friend could not quite understand. A thousand ardours clutched at his heart that he could not express; he saw in the Captain Generalship a step to the Stadtholdership—but what of the war?

"War is inevitable, M. de Zuylestein says——"

"It has been so ever since M. de Pomponne was recalled—"

De Courtin's nomination was a mere farce—M. de Witt would never see it," answered the Prince.

"You speak of France?"

"Meaning England also—what hath she become but King Louis' tool?" He put his hand to his brow. "Come to dinner, William, and speak of other things."

CHAPTER V

THE DECLARATION OF WAR

“ I WRITE this for your private satisfaction, and that you may be fully informed of how affairs stand with me, and that way be better able to help us, as I am sure you have the will.

“ Since war was declared in London my burdens have become almost intolerable. I usually work from eight in the morning till nine at night, often without touching food, and still cannot get through all there is to do. Their High Mightinesses have allowed my clerk, M. Van den Bosch, to take my place in the Assembly and make notes of the speeches, and have also permitted me to share some of my duties with M. Vivien, otherwise I could not do it.

“ The labour is incredible, and on all sides I am rewarded with complaints; the forced loans raise a storm of dissent, yet there is bitter railing that the Army is reduced and the forts dismantled. I am accused of every corruption conceivable, from a secret understanding with M. de Louvois to the taking of the Secret Service money for my own uses.

“ I tell you this to show something of the state the country is in; the voices of prudence, justice, and common sense can scarce be heard among the clamour of the factions. My desire for peace is regarded with suspicion, and my opposition to the violation of the Act of Harmony as a crime.

“ The Prince of Orange had to take the oaths never to attempt, or even accept, the Stadtholdership, on his appointment to the Captain Generalship.

“ But what are oaths in these times?

“ Few have lately shown themselves jealous of their word. The magistrates, frightened by the people, lean to the side of the Prince, and I fear we have knocked away the keystone of our liberty.

"This young man wishes to be absolute; he shows his imperious temper more clearly every day. He has already given marks of his dislike to Colonel Bampffield and other officers in my confidence.

"M. Fagel is utterly on his side, and M. Heinsius; only M. de Groot (at present dismissed by his French Majesty from Paris), M. Beuningen, and M. Vivien remain staunch.

"My brother Cornelius departed for the Fleet the 9th of this month. He is so crippled with rheumatism that he hath to direct his ship from an arm-chair on the deck; the Lord God guard him.

"You see I give you family news, knowing that your love for me will tolerate it. At present I have in my house my sister, her husband, my father, and my children, who are just returned from a visit to their uncle, Bicker Van Swieten.

"They desire their kind remembrances to you.

"The last news is that the King of France has joined his troops at Charleroi and so opened the campaign.

"The Prince of Orange starts to-morrow for his camp; his headquarters are to be at Bodegraven. My heart misgives me that such an untried boy should be put in complete command of our sole defences.

"But it is astonishing what enthusiasm there is for him in the Army. General Wurtz and Prince John Maurice both declare he is worth 100,000 men, and M. de Ruyter says his sailors work better now His Highness is at the head of things.

"His popularity is at fever height. He further pleases the people by declaring for war, and wishing to break off the negotiations I have with so much labour been keeping open. It seems as if I could do nothing right and he nothing wrong.

"God help us in our extremity.

"I cannot tell you how I miss the pleasure of your company. I know that this lamentable war is the defeat of your policy as it is of mine, and that you wish us nothing but good; it is another motive for me to desire to be free of these unhappy times, that we might meet and converse again. Keep me in your heart always, I pray you, and write to me privately when you have the leisure.

"MM. Condé, Turenne, Vauban, and Luxemburg are with His Majesty at Charleroi, and one of the finest armies, I hear, that ever left France. I still keep up a correspondence with

M. de Louvois, but I have little hope of obtaining reason and justice from a rapacious minister and a vain-glorious king.

"But He who hath put these afflictions on me will teach me how to bear them, and I must not repine against what He chooses to lay on me.

"Give my loving duty to your lady, and take as much yourself from one who will always be your friend,

"JOHN DE WITT

"Given at my house in the Kneuterdyk Avenue, May 17, 1672. The Hague"

The Grand Pensionary shook the sand over his letter, folded and sealed it, then wrote on the cover in his refined, clear hand: "To the Honourable Sir William Temple, Baronet, at his residence at Sheen, in the County of Surrey, England."

It was late afternoon. When the Grand Pensionary rose and raised his eyes he saw a glimmer of gold and green through the window beside his desk, the quiver of the trees, the glow of the sunshine in the garden, which was filled with narcissi, daffodils, and tulips arranged in circles, half-moons, and straight bars of colour among the close grass and neat gravel-paths.

Under the limes sat Anna de Witt with her spinning-wheel, which made a swift, gentle sound as her foot touched the treadle. The sunshine rested on her smooth yellow hair and white cap, and on her rich but simple grey satin gown.

On a low stool beside her sat Agneta, also in grey, for the daughters of John de Witt were still in mourning for their mother.

About their feet the pigeons gathered and strutted, pearl coloured and white, and grey the hue of Anna's flax.

John de Witt stood for a moment at the window looking at the quiet little figures under the trees, then he turned away quickly and was about to touch a bell on his table when Jacob de Witt entered the library.

"Ah, I did not know that you were at home, sir," said the Grand Pensionary.

"I can do very little till the States sit again," answered the old man, "very little."

He seated himself by the blue-tiled hearth and clasped his hand round the black stick he carried.

This last month or so had given him his full age; his head trembled a little and his shoulders were bowed.

"You are so seldom here now, John," he said wistfully.

"Sir, I am here now but for a while, I must leave instantly."

"Where are you going?"

John de Witt crossed to his father's chair.

"The Prince leaves for the Army to-morrow, sir, and I think it desirable that I should see him first."

Jacob de Witt sighed.

"To the end," his son added, "that no private bitterness may endanger our safety—His Highness must know that I shall second him with my whole power."

"He knows that already."

"I have not seen him," John de Witt answered slowly, "since he was invested with the Captain Generalship—he is surrounded by those who are no friends to me. There must be some understanding between us," he repeated anxiously—"some understanding."

The old man straightened himself in his chair, his dim eyes seemed to gather fire—

"What understanding can there be between you and this young man, John? Son of a bad House, of the cursed Stewarts and the arrogant Nassau, he is a born tyrant, like his father—woe to us if he triumph——"

"Hush, my father!" the Grand Pensionary interrupted, "we cannot judge him by another's sins."

"We can judge him by the blood that is in him."

"He hath been elected to lead our armies, as his fellow-servant of the State I must support him," said John de Witt firmly. "Personal feelings must not touch politics, sir."

Jacob de Witt's thin hands tightened round his stick.

"Do you think that is the way he looks at it, John? If he snatches the power, will he be magnanimous to you—to any of us? He comes of a race that can hate—of a race that cannot forgive."

The Grand Pensionary looked at his father with wide and tired eyes.

"I pray you speak words of good omen, sir," he said softly.

The old man went on as if he did not hear—

"You have never felt the weight of a prince's anger, you have never been cast into prison by the wrath of a tyrant. . . . What have we done?" his voice rose almost to a wail, "what have we done? . . . Nursed a viper to destroy us . . ."

"Sir!" cried John de Witt, "I have given the Prince no cause to hate me."

"No cause?"

The old statesman's stern eyes rested on his son.

"You have kept him for twenty years out of what he considers his own. . . . Do you think that William of Orange does not hold that cause enough to hate you?"

The Grand Pensionary put his hand to his heart in a half agitated manner.

"That the Prince disliked my office I have been brought to see—that he hates me I cannot believe—" he paused, then added,—“he owes me some gratitude.”

"He will hate you the more for that," replied Jacob de Witt. "Gratitude!—Prince Maurice was grateful to John Van Olden Barnenveldt, was he not?"

"I think the Prince is noble at heart," said the Grand Pensionary firmly. "I did not educate him to be like Prince Maurice nor like his father——"

But Jacob de Witt interrupted sternly—

"He should have been treated as the Lord Cromwell treated the faithless Stewart if the United Provinces were to keep their liberty."

"Certainly, I think you wrong him."

"It is you, John, who give him virtues never yet found in the hearts of princes," returned the old republican grimly.

The Grand Pensionary glanced through the window at that peaceful picture of his daughters under the trees.

"What do you seek to persuade me to, sir?" he asked gently.

"I seek to prevent you making further submission to the Prince of Orange."

"Sir, I have never submitted to him, nor departed from the Perpetual Edict . . . you know how I fought against his appointment . . . but once the States have elected him I must help, not hinder, him in his duties."

Jacob de Witt shook his head.

"Of a brood of tyrants," he said in a low voice, "tyrants . . ."

John de Witt raised his noble, mournful face—

"Until he proves himself otherwise I must treat the Prince as an honourable man—a patriot."

"May God reward you for it—for William of Orange never will."

"Nevertheless, sir, it is necessary that I see the Prince."

"Why?" demanded the old man vigorously. "M. de Montbas made the mistake of waiting on him—and received a haughty rebuff for his pains. The Staff of the Army is arranged—and there you have been too just, M. Beverningh, the head of the Representatives of the States General, is on the Prince's side——"

He was interrupted by the entry of M. Van Ouvenaller.

"His Highness the Prince of Orange, Mynheer."

The Grand Pensionary turned and Jacob de Witt rose.

Before either could speak the Prince appeared in the doorway, and M. de Witt's secretary, after holding it respectfully open for him, bowed and withdrew.

"I am glad to see Your Highness," said the Grand Pensionary sincerely.

William touched his hat without raising it and looked at Jacob de Witt.

"Good day, Mynheer."

The salutation might have been for both or neither, so indifferently was it given; when next he spoke it was directly to the older man.

"We have not met for some time, M. de Witt."

The old republican came a step nearer the Prince.

Loevenstein was in the minds of both, and that struggle of twenty years ago when the family of de Witt had risen to greatness on the fall of the House of Orange.

Their eyes met.

William very slightly smiled. He was dressed more richly than was his former wont; he wore a circular mantle of dull pink velvet turned up over one shoulder showing the red lining, the cloth-of-gold coat beneath was cut away over a black velvet waistcoat, the heavily fringed baldric supporting the gilt-handled sword he now always wore. His dress was an indication of his altered position; to M. Jacob de Witt his whole bearing was an offence.

"I am leaving the Hague to-morrow," said the Prince, with a courteous but unmistakable malice. "Shall I not have your good wishes first?"

The old man drew himself erect and firmly clasped his stick.

"I pray daily for the success and safety of the Republic," he answered sternly.

"But not for me, Mynheer?" asked William quietly.

"I pray that Your Highness may be a worthy servant of the country that owes everything to my son."

With a gesture of unspeakable pride he pointed to John de Witt.

"Ingratitude is the vice of princes," he said strongly. "May God preserve Your Highness from that fault."

He moved to the door, turning his back on the Prince with the air of one who has administered a just rebuke.

John de Witt thought that the Prince would answer, and answer in words that neither could forgive.

But William was silent; he merely raised his brows a little and waited for the elder de Witt to leave.

The Grand Pensionary, proud and collected as ever, remained where the Prince's entrance found him, his back to the window, his eyes on His Highness.

The moment that the door closed William spoke.

"You must forgive me for disturbing you, Mynheer."

"I intended waiting on Your Highness myself immediately," replied the Grand Pensionary formally.

"Their High Mightinesses consider that I should leave the Hague to-morrow," answered William in the same tone, "since the King of France hath joined his camp at Charleroi."

John de Witt advanced a little across the room.

"Will you be seated, Highness?"

The Prince took the chair Jacob de Witt had quitted.

He still wore his hat; it heavily shaded his face, that was, even for him, pale. He coughed continually as he spoke, and his eyes were unnaturally brilliant and languid lidded.

"We have not seen each other since your appointment," said John de Witt, "and I am glad to have this opportunity of speaking to Your Highness."

William laid his fringed gloves, his riding-whip, and a red rose he was carrying down on the table beside him.

He came, characteristically, straight to the point.

"You opposed my election, Mynheer; you have contrived to restrict my authority . . . the War Council of the States General are to accompany me and be consulted on every step I take."

"It is true, Highness," was the grave response.

"Very well, Mynheer, what I have obtained has been in spite of you. . . . I asked your help and you refused it. . . . But now?—I am the chief of the Army, you of the State . . . what now?"

He fixed his dark eyes on M. de Witt's face.

"Now, Highness, I will support you by every means in my power," answered John de Witt firmly. "Do you think," he added, with a mournful smile, "that I am of so paltry or jealous a nature as to indulge my private feelings at the expense of the public welfare and safety?"

"No, I did not think so, M. de Witt," answered William.

"I have never borne personal ill-will to you, Prince. I of myself would never have given you the appointment you now

hold, but since you do hold it, by the wish of the country, I will help you, willingly and very loyally."

"Thank you, Mynheer," said William, still formally.

"Put me to the test," urged the Grand Pensionary. "If there is anything in my power——"

"Yes," interrupted the Prince, "I have come a second time to ask you to help me."

He drew a paper from his pocket and spread it out on the table.

"This is the list of the Staff of the Army—there has been a prolonged contest over the choice, Mynheer."

He smiled, not very pleasantly, and then coughed, pressing his lace handkerchief to his lips.

John de Witt crossed the room to stand beside his chair.

William read from his list—

"The two Major-Generals, Prince John Maurice of Nassau and Paul Wurtz—I have nothing to say against them."

One was his own relative, the other devoted to his cause. He might well pass these names.

"Commander of the Cavalry, the Rhyngrove, Frederick Magnus, Count Salm, Governor of Maestricht."

He also was devoted to the Prince. William made no comment.

"The Rhyngrove's two lieutenant-generals, John of Weldeven and the Count of Nassau Saarbruck."

Both these men had always been attached to the House of Orange.

William continued—

"Commander of the Infantry, Frederick of Nassau, Lord of Zuylestein; his lieutenant-generals, Count Königsmarck and William of Aylva; master general of ordinance, Count Hornes; quartermaster general, Moyse Pain et Vin; 'sergeant majors' of infantry, Colonel Kirkpatrick and Count Styrum."

Of these two last the first was a Scotch Calvinist bearing a bitter hatred to the English Government, the second a near relation of the Prince through his grandmother.

"Your Highness has nothing to say against these gentlemen?" asked the Grand Pensionary, with a gentle sarcasm.

William raised his eyes from the paper.

"There are the two commissary generals of the cavalry whom I have not yet named, Mynheer."

John de Witt's eyes narrowed.

"Your Highness means the Viscount de Montbas and Colonel Bampffield?"

"Yes."

"What of them, Highness?"

William coughed.

"Those two positions are positions of great trust, Mynheer."

"I know it, Highness."

"I should suggest that they be filled differently."

John de Witt flushed.

"Why?"

"They are neither of them men whom I should choose to have under me."

"Your Highness must explain yourself."

"Briefly, I do not trust them."

"They were both nominated by me, Highness."

"I know, Mynheer."

John de Witt drew back a little from the table, and stood looking down at the Prince with an almost incredulous expression.

He would not have believed that William would have the audacity to take exception to the only two officers of republican sympathies on his Staff.

"They are also my friends, Highness," he continued with some haughtiness.

"I know that, Mynheer," said the Prince; "but you are not, I think, of such a paltry nature as to indulge private feelings at the expense of the welfare of the State."

The tone in which William repeated these words he had used brought the colour into M. de Witt's face.

"Both these soldiers, Highness, are men whom the country should be proud of—they have my entire trust and confidence."

"I am sorry," answered the Prince dryly.

"What have you against them, Highness?"

The new Chief of the Army kept down his glance. "Colonel Bampffield is a good soldier—but——"

"He hath the misfortune to be my friend," broke in John de Witt with some feeling.

"He is a Swede, Mynheer—a mere soldier of fortune. I do not consider him fitted for a post of importance."

"And M. de Montbas?—you always disliked him!"

"Yes, I never liked him, Mynheer—and I do not trust him."

"Not trust him?"

"No."

"This is intolerable! . . . Your Highness, in what way do you not trust him?"

"He is a Frenchman."

"But a Protestant—and since many years in our service."

"Still, Mynheer, a subject of the King of France," answered William. "I do not trust, I repeat, the Vicomte de Montbas—and since I am not empowered to choose my own officers, I have come to you to procure his dismissal, Mynheer de Witt."

With that the Captain General looked steadily at the Grand Pensionary, who was both angered and taken aback.

The Prince's request seemed to him both bold and insolent, though it was proffered with an almost disdainful quiet.

He curbed the anger that rose to his lips, and kept his glance averted from William's cool and slightly mocking face.

"M. de Montbas is my friend," he said sternly, "and in the confidence of Their High Mightinesses. . . . I will listen to nothing against him—no, nothing," he repeated in some agitation.

Somewhat to his surprise the Prince replied at once—

"Very well—it is not my affair—I have made my request and been refused." He lifted his brows. "Well, you will take the responsibility—as you do for every other action of the civil Government."

Now M. de Witt looked at him.

"Yes, I will take the responsibility, Your Highness," he answered proudly. "M. de Montbas is as trusty, worthy a gentleman as any under Your Highness' command——"

"I am glad that you will answer for him, Mynheer."

"We will talk no more of it," replied the Grand Pensionary ;
"he stays."

William picked up the red rose and looked at it languidly.

"My brother," continued M. de Witt, "will not accompany Your Highness, as he hath answered the appeal of the States General to go as deputy plenipotentiary to the Fleet."

The Prince still kept his eyes on the flower.

"I am glad, Mynheer," he answered. "M. Cornelius de Witt and I are not likely to agree."

The Grand Pensionary gave him a long and searching glance.

"God forgive this stubborn spirit in Your Highness," he said.

William faintly smiled.

"Mynheer, let each keep to his business. . . . You need not have grudged me the sole command of the Army nor have appointed these Deputies to accompany me."

"It is for your own good—the undivided weight of authority was too heavy a burden for Your Highness."

"These lawyers know nothing of war," answered William disdainfully.

"Some might say as much of Your Highness—I for one who think you should have served before you ruled."

"I know that, Mynheer ;" the Prince laid down the rose. "You have no trust in me ; well, time will disclose whether or no I justify myself in this that I undertake."

"I shall do all I can to aid Your Highness." The generous heart of de Witt went out, despite everything, to this young man of no experience and of delicate health suddenly placed in this arduous and difficult post.

He blamed the ambition that had asked and the enthusiasm that had given the supreme command to William of Orange, and he feared the result for the United Provinces ; but he saw, as perhaps no one else could see, the thousand difficulties and

labours that must beset a general of twenty-one called to repel a foreign invasion with insufficient men and limited authority; the almost impossible task that faced a youth who had never seen a battle and now must come to the touch with an army of prodigious strength, already elated with glory, strong in prestige, and generaled by the most famous soldiers in the world.

On this impulse of reflection de Witt began to speak. He told the Prince what was being now done for the Navy, the Army; the fresh levies he was raising, the soldiers he hoped to add to the standing force. . . . He said what he could to encourage and hearten.

William listened, turning the rose about on the table beside him; once or twice he coughed and put his hand to his head.

When John de Witt paused he looked up slowly.

"This should have been seen to long ago," he said in a low voice.

"What do you mean?" asked the Grand Pensionary quickly.

William rose.

"This country is utterly unprepared for war. . . . The Navy is half disarmed, the Army of a miserable strength . . . the forts insufficiently garrisoned. . . . Those who have been governing the country for the last twenty years are those who must answer for it, Mynheer."

"You are blaming me?"

William caught up his gloves and the great red flower.

"I am the servant of the Republic—the Commander of the Army—nothing more—I cannot say what has been done amiss nor what rightly—doubtless you can answer for your conduct, Mynheer de Witt."

The Grand Pensionary had no weapon against an indirect attack, veiled in courtesy.

"If Your Highness will let me know your requirements I will see that Their High Mightinesses meet them," he answered simply.

The Prince flung back the pink velvet cloak and replaced the list of his officers in his pocket.

The fading, reddish sunlight gathered in the gold hilt of his

sword, ran down the length of the shining scabbard, and shone in the curls that lay on his shoulders.

"You must believe me always your friend," he said, lifting his brilliant eyes.

"And you always that I pray for your success—and that I will in every way assist you—Highness," responded M. de Witt sincerely.

"I shall remember," answered William, "and hereafter, without doubt, be glad to remind you of it."

John de Witt, encouraged by the quiet friendliness of the other's tone, continued with impulsive warmth—

"I shall work in the Cabinet as you in the field. Let no differences estrange us, for have we not the same object in view—the same hope to animate us, the same fear to spur us on? God, who has us both in His hand, keep you, Prince—and help you."

"Amen," said William. "And may He guide your councils, M. de Witt."

The Grand Pensionary held out his fine right hand.

William clasped it; his eyes perhaps were defiant, but that was not perceived by M. de Witt.

"I will write to Your Highness every day however pressing my business——"

"You shall hear from the camp, Mynheer."

They parted.

John de Witt sat down by his desk, one hand supporting his head the other hanging slackly by his side.

The Prince had not been gone three minutes before Agneta de Witt entered, rather breathlessly.

"Father!—who was that who has just left you?"

De Witt looked up, surprised.

"Dearest, the Prince—what is the matter?"

"Oh—nought—but I passed—him—in the hall, and he gave me a wicked look—as if he hated me—and all of us . . ."

CHAPTER VI

THE CONSPIRATORS

THE Prince and Mr. Bromley rode straight from M. de Witt's house to the Groote Kerk.

William pulled his hat over his eyes; his person was not as yet well known at the Hague, and though his beautiful horse attracted notice he avoided the recognition of the well-dressed crowds that thronged the streets.

Leaving Mr. Bromley without, he entered the church by the little back door that stood always open.

Bareheaded he opened the railing round the entrance and passed slowly into the body of the church.

Some of the high-set windows were shaded by green curtains; through others the sun streamed in clear, golden, slanting lines across the whitewashed walls. In the open space where the altar once stood a shaft of light dazzled and fell in a little square of brilliance on the stone pavement.

There were no splendid monuments; here and there a plain tablet grimly decorated with a skull or a cluster of bones, yellowing in the marble.

In every place along the stiff, high-backed pews were green hassocks, a Prayer-book, and a Bible primly arranged; round the stern pulpit the seats of the elders with their larger Bibles and the green markers hanging from between the heavy covers.

Opposite the pulpit was the plain pew belonging to the Princes of Orange. Here the late Stadtholder had worshipped, and here William, every Sunday since he could remember, had sat for three hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon, full in the eye of the preacher, with his open Bible in

front of him and before him the whitewashed walls and pillars, the straight green curtains, and the figure of the pastor in his black gown and bands, preaching the doctrines of John Calvin.

He could not recall having ever missed a service here while he was at the Hague. Sometimes his head had ached so that he could hardly hold it up, but he had always sat erect, with his eyes on the preacher, even when he was a child and could not understand the long words used.

Since the declaration of war the States had ordained Wednesday for fasting and prayer, and the Prince had invariably attended but—with his household.

Now, the day before his departure to the Army, he came, for the first time, to the church alone. He mounted into his pew and knelt in his place; his sword making an incongruous rattle on the wooden seat.

He folded his hands on the front of the pew where the Bible rested, hid his face in them, and knelt so, motionless.

The extraordinary silence of a place still in the midst of noise filled the church: the faint echo of the clamour of the busy city without seemed to come from a long way off; the sunshine fell on the blank walls with a dreary sense of remoteness; clamour and sunshine alike could only enter here by a guilty stealth, they seemed to belong to other regions.

When the clock struck it sounded loud and sombre, like a note of warning or reproof, and echoed gloomily down the empty aisles and bare altar chapel.

When at last the Prince rose he remained in his place, gazing down the grim whiteness of the church, his right hand resting on the Bible.

He was very pale, and there was a look of pain about his eyes.

For a while he stood so, the pink mantle rising and falling with his laboured breathing; then he turned sharply.

Some one had entered the church.

At first he could hear only footsteps, but presently three men came round the pillars.

The Prince picked up his gloves, his hat, and the rose, and descended from the pew, closing it after him.

As he stepped into the aisle he came face to face with the newcomers.

The recognition was instantaneous; he knew them for the three who had stepped out upon him from the mist at Scheveningen. They fell back respectfully, in silence.

William, not pleased at the meeting, passed on, but when he reached the covered entrance he found that they had followed him with the obvious intent of speaking.

The Prince at once turned, and, putting on his hat, faced them.

The foremost was a very young man, fair and eager, fashionably dressed; the other two older, and, it seemed, of a meaner station.

"You know me?" asked William.

"Your Highness, we do."

"Well?" demanded the Prince.

He knew these men for conspirators against the Government and that the youth who spoke was Jacob van der Graef, the author of *Advice to every Faithful Hollander*, the pamphlet said to have stung John de Witt the most among the many violent attacks made on him.

He knew also that they were Orangists whose enthusiasm was as genuine as it was unbalanced and foolishly directed.

Knowing and recalling this he deigned to stop and listen.

"Highness," said Jacob van der Graef, adoration in his face, "we are loyal subjects of yours——"

"Ah," William caught him up. "You, the son of a magistrate, Mynheer van der Graef—venture to say that!"

"We would venture more," returned one of the others, Van Bruyn, a lawyer.

"Take care, my friends," said the Prince; but the expression of his eyes rewarded them.

"Prince," said Van der Graef in a low, excited voice, "we would die for you—any one of us, and there are others—M. de Witt treats you vilely, he is a traitor to his country . . .

while he lives Your Highness will never come to your rights The United Provinces will not much longer bear his yoke."

"Speak a little more moderately, my child—or you will get into trouble," said the Prince, slightly smiling.

The young student sank to one knee on the flagstones.

"What can I do to serve Your Highness?" he asked passionately.

"Be prudent—for your own sake," returned William. "M. de Witt is still master."

The other two broke in—

"He is a traitor!"

"Nay," said the Prince; "he is a good man."

"A traitor to your House, Highness, and to the country."

"I do not say so," answered William. "But it seems he is not popular."

"The people hate him . . ."

"I wonder why?" The Prince's smile deepened.

"Because they love Your Highness!"

"I love the United Provinces, Mynheer——"

Jacob van der Graef rose.

"M. de Witt must go!" he cried.

"Go?"

"Cæsar's way—I would play Brutus for Your Highness' sake."

William coloured and drew a deep breath.

"It is dangerous to be a fool in these times, Mynheer . . . M. de Witt is not Cæsar."

He turned away quickly, opened the door, and stepped out into the sunny streets.

"Who were those went in but now?" asked Mr. Bromley curiously as his master mounted.

"Some of those who stir the country against M. de Witt."

"They followed you into the church?"

"I think so."

"Why, Highness?"

"To speak to me."

"Ah, they wished a little encouragement," nodded Mr. Bromley.

"They are fanatics," returned the Prince. "They call M. de Witt any vile name that occurs to them—and believe what they say."

"Can they be of any use to Your Highness?" asked Mr. Bromley.

The Prince let the spur touch his horse's side.

"Use to me?" He looked at his gentleman sideways. "What use should they be to me? . . . Were I M. de Witt I would police the Hague better."

"You think these malcontents are dangerous, Highness?"

"To the Government, yes. . . . There is no one so hated as a usurper, Bromley, when the people who gave him his power become tired of him."

"Does Your Highness think M. de Witt is hated in that fashion?"

"You must see that he is not loved," answered the Prince.

"It is curious, too," remarked the Englishman.

"It is," said William; "for, as I reminded M. Van der Graef but now, M. de Witt is a good man."

Mr. Bromley glanced quickly at his master. He was not a man of quick perceptions, but the Prince's mocking intonation could not altogether escape him.

"Remind me," continued William, "that when next I write to M. de Witt I mention that he had better take precautions——"

"Against what, Highness?"

"Assassination," said the Prince laconically; then, before Mr. Bromley could exclaim, he asked abruptly, "You have not heard from Arnheim—from M. Triglandt?"

"No, Highness."

"I should have liked to have seen him before I left the Hague," remarked the Prince, with such an effect of calmness that Mr. Bromley could not tell if any feeling was behind the words or no.

They had almost reached the Palace, and were riding briskly under the lime trees that bordered the canal, when a band of young men, advancing from a side street, crossed their path and brought them to a sudden halt. A crowd accompanied the band, the foremost of whom was carrying an orange flag, a white one displayed below it; this bore the inscription: "Orange op, Witte onder."

William was annoyed. He never loved the mob in any form or mood; he was utterly indifferent to popularity, which he rated too keenly at its true value.

He felt no gratitude to these people for their enthusiasm. They had suffered John de Witt for twenty years; despite their flag-waving and their shouting they suffered him still; therefore he sat silent, reining in his horse on the causeway of the canal and waiting for the crowd to pass.

But the beauty of the animal and the richness of the rider's dress did not escape the attention of the Orangists.

They looked at him.

He was of too marked an appearance to escape recognition long.

Some knew him at once.

They stopped, hesitated, swayed together . . .

"The Prince!" the word went round.

Then every hat and cap was off.

"Long live Your Highness! . . . God keep Your Highness!"

William touched his beaver.

"Thank you, my friends," he said gravely.

They crowded round him, men, women and boys . . .

Mr. Bromley felt a startled amazement to see the half sobbing, deep intensity of their enthusiasm; as if love of home, of country, and God were each and all expressed in their passionate devotion to this young man.

Like all reserved people, they did not lack expression when they were touched or roused.

William accepted their homage calmly; his attention seemed to be given to his horse that, fretted by the pressure, curveted and backed, bringing out his rider's horsemanship.

"And does Your Highness go to the war to-morrow?" asked one, eagerly.

"Ay, to-morrow," answered William, looking down at them.

At that they shouted anew, and roundly cursed the French.

Hearing that, the Prince slightly smiled.

"We will not see King Louis at Mass in the Groote Kerk—eh?" he said.

"Not while Your Highness lives!" shouted the young man with the flag.

William's brilliant glance rested on him.

"Thank you." He glanced round the eager faces. "Thank you all for your confidence. . . ."

They began to call frenzied curses on the MM. de Witt.

William checked them.

"Get back to your homes," he said, "and pray God to bless the cause I have in hand—to protect—the liberty of this country and the Protestant religion. . . ."

An old man came forward and kissed the Prince's stirrup . . . a girl was sobbing out loud; Mr. Bromley saw William go very pale.

He touched his hat again and pressed on. They fell back as the great horse moved; but they followed him to the Palace gate, blessing him.

A smile not wholly pleasant curled the Prince's lip. These people who had forsaken his House to obey a burgher citizen cursed their idealist lawyer, the man of peace, at the first touch of danger, and turned frantically to the son of their ancient rulers—the man of action; little real trust had they in maxims and the strength of quiet godliness; when it came to real issues they cried for the sword and the leader.

What did John de Witt's twenty years of service avail him now? . . . They called him a traitor, they wanted a Prince and a soldier—even at the price of losing their liberty.

William of Orange would not be content with what John de Witt had taken—a modest salary and the rank of a humble citizen; sovereign power was his price. He might save his

country, but he would rule it—as his ancestors had done, and with augmented powers—not the servant of the Republic, like John de Witt, but her master.

And they were very willing to put their liberty beneath his feet.

His face wore its least pleasant expression as he entered his Palace thinking of these things.

Mr. Bromley was silent, as always when his master seemed in one of his coldly cynical moods. The Prince was usually in a sardonic humour after he had been openly acclaimed by the crowd ; it pointed, perhaps, the difference between his actual position and the one he should have filled.

M. Bentinck was abroad, taking farewell of friends ; he was to accompany the Prince to the front.

William dined alone.

Afterwards he wrote a brief but kind letter to the Princess Dowager, and one to Cornelius Triglandt at Arnheim.

He gave these for dispatch to Mr. Bromley, who was wandering about the dreary Palace between excitement and depression.

It was now about half-past eight.

William dismissed him.

“ We leave at six to-morrow morning——”

“ So early, Highness ? ”

“ I wish to avoid the crowds—I shall not want you before then, Bromley.”

Thus left to his own resources, Mr. Bromley bethought him of some French players now performing at the Hague.

Since the declaration of war they had taken fright at the temper of the people and announced their early departure ; but to-night they were giving *Tartuffe*, and Mr. Bromley had long wanted to see them. He persuaded M. Heenvliet to accompany him ; it was their last chance they agreed, with a laugh—who could tell if either of them would see the Hague again ?

The Prince went upstairs to his silent rooms, opened the windows on the still spring night and drew the curtains.

Two candles on the mantelshelf and two on the desk lit the room ; between the last stood the red rose in a crystal glass.

William sat down at the desk and unlocked the drawers.

He employed no secretary, his letters were always in his own hand ; no confidant was tolerated in his intimate affairs.

Drawing the candle nearer to him, with a little half-slow movement, he commenced writing the letters that he hoped and intended should secure allies for the Republic.

The first was to the Emperor. He wrote it slowly, translating it into Spanish from the rough draft he had before him. The second, in German, which he wrote with ease, was to the Elector of Brandenburg ; in it he set forth the need of the United Provinces, and passionately implored help in the name of their common religion.

These finished, he set himself to write both to Charles of England, with the object of detaching him from the French Alliance, and to Sir William Temple.

These letters, that he composed carefully in English, occupied him a considerable time.

When he at length sealed them it was past midnight.

He gave a half glance at the clock, coughed, and leant back wearily in his chair.

It was absolutely silent ; a slight but sweet breeze filled the room ; the chimes of the Groote Kerk rang clearly with an iron clang into the night, breaking the stillness harshly. William snuffed the candles and began to sort his papers.

They were already carefully arranged and marked.

Some he burnt in the candle, some he put in his pocket ; the rest he locked away.

From an inner drawer he took a roll of maps and a bundle of notes and spread them out before him on the polished surface of the desk.

They were plans of the Yssel and Rhine, and diagrams of the forts protecting these rivers. Referring to the notes, he wrote under each fort the number of men, of guns, and the nature of the defences. In some cases he made calculations

and drawings of scarps and counterscarps, half moons and bastions.

He dwelt a long time over Maestricht, the key of the entrance to the Netherlands, and wrote across the plan that the garrison must be strengthened.

The Rhyngrave, Frederick Magnus, commanded there. The Prince, seeing the weakness of his men, wrote to him and desired him to raise levies from among the surrounding peasantry.

"—as I can send you no more soldiers and the loss of Maestricht would be almost a fatal disaster."

Then he looked again at the list he had shown M. de Witt, and wrote his comments beside the name of each officer.

When he came to that of the Viscount de Montbas he hesitated as if he would have liked to cross it out, but finally left it—opposite a blank.

Next he examined the names of the Deputies appointed by the Government to accompany him in the campaign.

He was not even to move the army without the consent of this Council of War, and as he glanced down their names his eyes darkened at the thought of this restriction put upon him by M. de Witt.

Cornelius de Witt and Beverningh for Holland; Ripperda de Buryse for Guelders; Crommon for Zeeland; Schude for Utrecht; Couvorden of Stouvelar for Overysse; Ysbrandt for Friesland; and Gokkinga for Groningen.

Cornelius de Witt having been transferred to the Fleet Beverningh was left head of the Council, and the Prince could twist Beverningh, once a loyal supporter of the Grand Pensionary, round his finger. Nevertheless he did not forgive M. de Witt this attempt to limit his authority and supervise his actions.

His bitterness against him was further revived when he came to look over the muster-roll of the forces with which he was to repel invasion.

Less than a year ago John de Witt, in pursuance of his peace policy, had disbanded a considerable portion of the

Army. Regarding politics as a science, he had overlooked the importance of war; he could not believe the policy of Louvois would find expression in the armies of Louis.

Subsequently he had done what he could to repair the error; but it was not one to be easily made good, nor one to be lightly forgiven by the young man who sat now looking at the list of his inadequate forces.

Thirty-four thousand five hundred and fifty-five foot, two thousand and six hundred horse—many ill trained, several regiments not paid—constituted the standing Army of the Republic.

The Grand Pensionary's urgent appeal to the States General had resulted in the promise of seventeen thousand men—not yet raised.

William laid the paper down and put his hand to his aching forehead.

Thirty-seven thousand men! . . . and Louis had left Paris with a hundred thousand, not to speak of the army already in Lorraine; a hundred thousand men, and Condé, Turenne, Vauban, and Luxembourg . . .

"Ah, M. de Witt, this is what your love for peace hath brought us to," muttered William between his teeth.

He turned his keen eyes to the list of the other forces at the disposal of the United Provinces.

The Fleet, under the command of de Ruyter, comprised a hundred ships, thirty fire-ships, twenty thousand sailors, and five thousand marines; with this force de Ruyter, who had already escorted the India convoy safely into the Texel, had to confront the combined ships of England and France.

William pushed back his chair and fixed his eyes on the dark square of window. His mind was busy with a question that was no part of the business of the Captain General: the financial position of the country.

The expenses of a campaign could not be less than 13,700,000 gulden for four months. The States had voted 3,000,000, and 1,500,000 for the Fleet. The National Debt

was seventeen millions; the country was already taxed to the utmost . . .

On the back of the list of Deputies William made a quick calculation of his own private fortune; an estimate of his jewels, estates, and property.

His serenely quiet life had enabled him to accumulate his revenues; his credit was good; he could raise large sums in Amsterdam on his mere note of hand, and he knew some German bankers who would, he thought, advance him money . . .

He rose at last, pushing back his disordered hair.

It was nearly half-past four.

M. Bentinck must have returned; the Prince rather wondered that he had not come to him.

There still remained some work to do, copying and docketing, and the Prince, weary and racked with a headache, wished M. Bentinck here to help.

Taking up a candle he went out on to the head of the stairs and listened intently.

He seemed the only person awake in the Palace; not a sound, a footfall, or a breath disturbed the quiet.

The Prince, remembering a book he wished to take with him to-morrow, went lightly down to the library; resigned to the fact that he must return and finish his work himself.

Under the library door a faint light showed.

The Prince thought at once of M. Bentinck, and opened the heavy door.

A couple of candles burning on the table between the windows revealed a man sitting before them, busily writing.

At the sound of the opening door he looked quickly up.

"Your Highness!" he exclaimed, and rose hastily.

"Ah, M. Van Mander," said William, slightly surprised.

"Where is M. Bentinck?"

"Gone to bed, Your Highness."

"And the others?"

"I think every one is abed, Your Highness."

The Prince smiled.

"Save you and I." He came farther into the room. "Why do you sit up, Mynheer Van Mander?"

Florent coloured.

"I—could not sleep to-night."

William looked at him sharply.

"What are you doing?"

"Copying some letters M. Bentinck gave me, Highness."

"Well, finish them."

The Prince crossed to the far end of the room, held his light up to the book-shelves and took down the volume—a Latin work on tactics—that he sought.

"I have finished, Highness," said Florent in a humble voice. He fixed his eyes ardently and half pleadingly on the Prince.

William turned, with the book in his hand, and looked at him.

Florent had an instant and haunting picture of the Prince: his cloth-of-gold suit and black jet embroidered waistcoat glimmered into points of light in the glow of the candle he held; a little diamond brooch in the lace at his throat sent out long changing rays of blue and green; he looked colourless and ill; his eyes were heavy lidded and shadowed underneath, the curls on his forehead disordered and damp; he breathed with noticeable labour, as if utterly exhausted.

"Is Your Highness not taking any repose to-night?" asked Florent timidly.

William turned towards the door.

"*'Annibal erit brevi ad portas,'*" he said, with a slight smile.

Florent stood mute.

"If you will you can help me," added the Prince. "I have still somewhat to do—will you come upstairs?"

Van Mander blushed violently. He did not say anything, but William's keen glance seemed satisfied with his expression and demeanour.

"I do not wish to wake M. Bentinck," continued the Prince; "we have still an hour," he pulled out his watch.

Florent extinguished his candles and took that the Prince held, preceding him with it up the wide, dark stairs.

When they reached William's apartment the Prince gave Florent some of the notes he had been writing and bade him copy them.

He himself walked up and down; stopping now and then to look out of the window on to the night, where the darkness lifted slowly.

Florent hardly raised his eyes from the desk; the scratching of his quill and the Prince's light step were the only sounds.

At last William threw himself into the deep chair by the hearth, and sat there so still that Florent thought him asleep. But looking up from his finished task he saw that the Prince's eyes were open and shining with a bright lustre. As Florent gazed at him he moved, and glanced at the black clock between the candles on the mantelpiece.

It was well past five, and the steadily increasing glow of dawn in the chamber made the candle-flames show yellow and feeble.

The Prince rose and came over to Florent's seat.

"Have you completed that?"

"Yes, Highness."

"Will you put up these papers?" he pointed to them.

"That letter to the King of England is for M. Gabriel Sylvius—who will come for it presently. . . . Will you remain here till I return?"

Without waiting for an answer he went into his bedchamber and closed the door.

Florent arranged the papers as he was told; then put out the unnecessary candles and got to his feet, stretching himself.

The freshness of the early wind was marvellous.

The secretary went to the wide open window. Before him were the trees in their ideal freshness and the green walks of the Palace garden; beyond the turrets and towers of the Hague.

The birds were beginning their lusty, untaught harmony

and a rose-coloured veil was being lifted from the heavens, disclosing the blue of a fair spring day.

Florent rested his head against the mullions and drew a troubled breath.

War . . . the beginning of War . . . what was it like? . . . War.

At Charleroi lay a great army, coming nearer—from Chatham and from Brest huge armaments advanced . . . nearer. . . . A curious fact to dwell on, here, looking over the peaceful Hague.

Well, he, Florent Van Mander, was no patriot . . . yet it was strange to think of this country of his, not long ago the Arbitrator of Europe, the greatest maritime power in the world, the richest, most prosperous in commerce, fallen to a footstool for the French.

Even a hero could not prevent it, he thought, and the Republic owned no hero; only John de Witt, who was a good man, and William of Orange, who was playing his own game . . .

This very night he had written a letter to his uncle Charles . . . perhaps it was a guarantee that Louis' troops should not find their conquest difficult . . . in consideration of . . . a price.

Florent smiled bitterly.

Yet he told himself that only a fool would act otherwise. . . . Since the country was lost one must snatch what might be from the wreck. Yet . . . yet . . . however . . . the Prince did it very well . . .

"Annibal erit brevi ad portas" he had said, and as if the danger touched him nearly.

Florent turned restlessly from the window as William re-entered from the inner chamber.

Under his pink mantle he wore black armour, and he held under his arm his helmet, mounted with a black feather.

His sword was strapped to his waist, and he supported it with his right hand.

His bright hair and his pale face were in curious contrast

with the dull, shining mail. He placed his steel gauntlets and his helmet down on a chair and crossed to the desk, taking up the papers Florent had left there ready for him.

"Go and see if M. Bentinck is abroad," he commanded, and he unfolded the plan of the line of the Yssel and gazed at it.

Florent left the room, to return almost immediately with M. Bentinck, who had slept well all night and was as gay as if he were starting for a hunt in Guelders.

William gave him a charming smile and rolled up the map.

"M. de Zuylestein is below with his regiment of cavalry." M. Bentinck, who was also in armour, bent and kissed his master's hand. "I think you will already find the streets full of people——"

"They had best keep their cheers for our return," answered William briefly.

Florent was observing him closely. He wished that he might have accompanied M. Bentinck to the war; the empty Palace was no alluring prospect . . .

The Prince wonderfully softened his discontent by entrusting him with the letters lying on the little desk, and giving him his instructions for M. Gabriel Sylvius, who had not yet arrived.

Then he said "Good-bye," nodded, and went downstairs.

In the hall he took unconcerned leave of the rest of his household, M. Heenvliet, M. Renswoude, M. Boreel, handing to the last the keys of his desk.

By now the sun was bright and strong, lying in scattered patches of gold on the grass beneath the Palace trees.

The Prince gave his helmet to an officer and put on his hat.

Mr. Bromley came to say his horse was waiting. William was leaving the Palace when he stopped at a sudden recollection and mounted the stairs.

When, a moment later, he returned he wore a red rose fastened into the brooch of his cravat.

"Are you ready, Highness?" asked M. Bentinck.

The Prince stepped out into the sunlight, he coughed, and closed his eyes for a second as if shaken with pain.

The clock of the Groote Kerk struck six.

Florent Van Mander watched the little cavalcade ride away.

CHAPTER VII

THE POLICY OF M. DE WITT

MYNHEER GASPARD FAGEL was roused by persistent knocking on his door.

He sat up in his bed and cursed roundly. He was working almost to the limit of his strength and contenting himself with about four hours' rest, and his one feeling was rage at being disturbed. He pulled back the curtains and shouted angrily—

"Come in—in God's name!"

His servant entered, in hastily snatched-up garments.

"What is the matter?" demanded Gaspard Fagel sharply, his vexation giving place to alarm.

"Mynheer, the Grand Pensionary is below," cried the servant. "Oh, Mynheer, is it the French, and shall we all be murdered in our beds?"

"Be quiet, you fool!" M. Fagel sprang on to the floor. "Get me my dressing-gown. . . . M. de Witt below?" By the aid of the light that the man held he glanced at his watch on the table by his bed; it was four o'clock.

"Yes, Mynheer—he must see you at once he says."

"Is he agitated?" asked the Secretary of the United Provinces, snatching up his slippers.

"He is the same as ever, Mynheer—but something dreadful must have happened to bring him here at this hour."

Gaspard Fagel was of the same opinion, nothing but an affair of great moment could have brought M. de Witt to see him—and at this hour.

"It is the French," repeated the servant, who seemed utterly confounded.

"Put that candle down or you will set the house on fire with your trembling," said M. Fagel, struggling into his clothes. "And don't talk so much of the French—the Prince of Orange is between us and them."

"M. de Witt must have heard from His Highness, Mynheer."

"Hold your tongue——"

M. Fagel snatched up the candle,

"And get back to your bed," he said angrily, "and see to it you rouse no one else."

With that he left the room, and, half dressed, clad in a blue, flowered dressing-gown, descended to the parlour where M. de Witt awaited him.

A candle, hastily lit, stood on the table; it but feebly illumined the small, handsomely appointed room.

Standing by the mantelshef, wrapped in a black velvet mantle, was the Grand Pensionary.

He held his hat and his gloves in his hand. He was pallid, his lips tightly drawn, his eyes narrowed with an intent expression.

"Good morning," said M. Fagel, a little flushed and breathless.

"Ah, Mynheer Fagel."

John de Witt appeared perfectly composed; he spoke quietly.

"Ill news?" asked the Secretary of the United Provinces.

He was something embarrassed by the sudden presence under his roof of the man who was both his adversary and his rival.

"Will you not be seated?" added M. Fagel.

The Grand Pensionary took the chair nearest to him.

"I have come directly here from the Binnenhof," he said.

M. Fagel lit the other candles on the table and looked at M. de Witt over the flames.

"You have had bad news?" he hazarded, puckering his brows.

"Yes, M. Fagel, I have."

The Secretary caught at the tassels of the blue dressing-gown.

"From de Ruyter?"

"No—I have heard nothing from him."

"From the Prince?" M. Fagel's voice came somewhat hoarsely.

"No—my news is from Maestricht—from the Rhynggrave."

De Witt raised his head sharply as he spoke and regarded the other man.

Across the wavering lights and shadows their eyes met.

"Well?" demanded M. Fagel.

John de Witt raised his hand to his breast.

"This—the French have crossed the Rhine——"

Gaspard Fagel stepped back.

"Crossed the Rhine?"

"—on the 9th—they are marching on the Yssel . . . one hundred thousand strong."

"God!" cried Gaspard Fagel. He sank into the chair beside him, his dressing-gown flowing open over his shirt.

"Oh! . . . my God!"

There was no change in John de Witt's pale, proud face.

"Their leader is Condé . . . our outposts were undefended . . . the French hardly lost a man . . . every fort guarding the Rhine has fallen."

M. Fagel put his hand to his brow, it seemed as if he would tear his hair.

"We are defended by cowards, it seems!" he exclaimed.

"Has *every* garrison surrendered?"

"Every one."

"And Maestricht . . . Bois le Duc . . . Nymwegen?"

"They can scarce escape."

"And Condé?"

"He marches on Utrecht."

"Utrecht!"

"Wesel hath fallen—and half the Republic is lost with that."

"And the campaign hath been opened nine days . . ."

"In nine more Condé may be at the Hague."

"But the Prince?"

"He falls back on Utrecht."

"Without an engagement?"

"He dare not risk one it would seem—he has not written to me."

"Had he no soldiers on the Rhine?" cried M. Fagel, incredulous.

"M. de Montbas, with two regiments of cavalry——"

"And he?"

"Was cut to pieces or—fled."

"Ah, you do not know?"

"Not yet."

"This is a creditable beginning!"

M. de Witt put his hand over his eyes.

"M. de Luxembourg is burning and slaying . . . like Alva . . . they are already drunk with victory."

"What is to be done?"

"What hope have we if Utrecht falls!"

"The Prince will defend it——"

"The Prince is defending the Yssel."

"We must send more levies."

"Ah, M. Fagel, have I not strained every nerve already to send more levies?"

"What is to be done?"

"God hath been pleased to put us in bitter straits."

"What do you propose, Mynheer? What shall we do?"

It was a long time since Gaspard Fagel had deigned to ask the Grand Pensionary's advice, but in the hour of terror and alarm the weaker nature threw aside pride and recognised the stronger.

M. de Witt uncovered his eyes and raised his head.

"I have come here to you, now, Mynheer, with my suggestion."

"To me?"

John de Witt gave him a steady, mournful glance.

"You are no longer my friend, I know, M. Fagel."

"Mynheer——!" protested the Secretary in a fluster of agitation.

"That is understood between us—I come to you as to the chief of the Orange party in the absence of His Highness."

These two had been friends once, and allies, before Gaspard Fagel had been led by ambition to envy the position of the Grand Pensionary and serve the Prince.

At John de Witt's calm, sad recognition of their estrangement and its motive the Secretary was silent.

"You represent the party that has always been for war, M. Fagel, as I that for peace—you have, perhaps, more influence in the Assembly than I——"

"M. de Witt——"

The Grand Pensionary silenced him.

"It is true."

M. Fagel wiped his lips.

"What do you want of me?"

"Your help in the Assembly."

"For what end?"

For the first time John de Witt showed some agitation.

"That we may possibly, under God's help, avert the disaster that threatens us."

"In what manner?"

"By endeavouring to obtain peace from the King of France."

"Never!" cried Gaspard Fagel. "Never!"

John de Witt answered with suppressed passion—

"Orsoy, Rhynberg, Burick, and Wesel have fallen."

The Secretary made no answer.

"I see no means of saving the United Provinces, M. Fagel."

Now the Secretary looked at him defiantly and rose, resting one hand on the table between them.

"Well, Mynheer, the Republic hath before this been reduced to even greater extremities, and by God's help been saved—if He saved us from the tyranny of Philip, surely He will preserve us from the tyranny of Louis."

"God gave our ancestors the courage and resource to save themselves, M. Fagel. . . . I do not see these virtues among us now."

"Would you despair of the vessel before she is on the rocks?" cried Gaspard Fagel stoutly. But in his heart he was frightened; never before had he known John de Witt speak despondently. "For my part," he added, "I will do anything in my power to bring her safe to port."

"Then you will help me?" John de Witt spoke eagerly.

"I do not know—I do not know. . . . What do you intend doing?"

M. Fagel took a hasty turn about the room, his hands clasped behind him under the blue dressing-gown.

"I intend to propose in the Assembly that envoys be at once sent to the King of France to request his terms, and to offer him everything so that we keep our final liberty."

"Have you no trust in the Prince?" demanded the Secretary, trying to hearten himself into a confidence he could not feel.

"The Prince cannot do the impossible," answered John de Witt dryly.

"Ah, you blame him for the passage of the Rhine," cried M. Fagel on a note of challenge.

"No . . . he has been but a few days with the Army . . . he has not proved himself." The Grand Pensionary spoke sternly. "We need other measures."

"And you wish to open negotiations with the French?" repeated Gaspard Fagel.

As the head of the party opposing M. de Witt in the Councils of the State, Fagel was bound to vote for war; the Grand Pensionary had not expected to find him tractable, yet by alarming him he hoped to gain him eventually.

"You cannot refuse to help me," he said now firmly; "these embassies will at least gain us time—and you are not surely so infatuated as to suppose the Prince of Orange can withstand the progress of the French?"

The dismayed Secretary had no answer ready.

John de Witt saw his advantage and pushed it further.

"The alliances with Spain, with Brandenburg, might save us yet—had we time to conclude them——"

M. Fagel interrupted—

"You cannot imagine that Louis would listen to any reasonable treaty—he fights for glory——"

"M. de Louvois is with him—he might deem it prudent not to push us to extremes."

"It would be a humiliation !"

"Not so bitter a humiliation as to see Condé march through the Hague!" flashed M. de Witt.

"I cannot believe it could come to that."

"Could you have believed a month ago that in nine days every fort on the Rhine would fall?"

"There is de Ruyter," said the Secretary, clutching at straws.

"He cannot save the land forces."

Gaspard Fagel was obstinate.

"There is the Prince."

"M. Fagel, the Prince is opposed to Condé, Turenne, Luxumbourg, and an immense army strong with success——"

As he spoke M. Fagel's terrified servant entered—

"Mynheer," he addressed the Grand Pensionary, "a gentleman has just ridden up from the Binnenhof . . . there are . . . news, he says, from the Army——"

M. de Witt interrupted—

"May he come up?"

"In God's name—yes," cried M. Fagel.

The gentleman proved to be M. Van den Bosch; he explained his visit with the national calm.

A soldier had arrived at the Binnenhof with letters from the Army, among them one from His Highness for M. de Witt, and as he, still working there, knew of his master's intention to visit M. Fagel he had brought the letter on at once. There was also a note from M. Beverningh. He apologised for his intrusion, bowed and withdrew.

"From the Prince!" cried M. Fagel, mopping his brow.

John de Witt paled as he gazed at the large, familiar handwriting.

A sickly hue of dawn was mingled with the glow of the candles, and in the cross lights the figure of the Grand

Pensionary showed tall and sombre in his black velvet mantle, his worn face near as colourless as his crumpled white collar.

Gaspard Fagel went to the handsome oak buffet and, pouring wine into a tall green glass, drank fiercely.

M. de Witt stepped nearer to the candles and broke open the seals of the Prince's letter. There were only a few lines.

The Grand Pensionary read them and handed them in silence to the Secretary.

"Given at my camp on the Yssel
June 12, 1672

"SIR,—I am in great distress, learning the approach of the enemy and having only insufficient forces to oppose to him.

"My authority is restricted and my movements hampered by the delegates, who forbid me to risk a battle.

"The militia and the peasants are in a state of terror at the advance of the French ; the division available for the defence of the Yssel is only 22,000 men, so I must beg you to order without an hour's delay that as many soldiers as possible be sent from Maestricht, Bois-le-duc, Breda, Bergen-op-Zoom, and the other strong places in Flanders.

"I think also that the few horse and foot which are still in Holland should be sent here.

"Otherwise I see no prospect of preventing the enemy crossing the Yssel.

"I entreat you to hold out a helping hand to one who is and ever will be, your affectionate friend,

"WILLIAM HENRY, Prince of Orange"

M. Fagel laid the letter down in silence ; he, too, was pale.

"God help us all !" he muttered.

The Grand Pensionary tore open M. Beverningh's letter ; he read it at once aloud—

"You will have heard of the disastrous passage of the Rhine—here the situation is desperate.

"I hope we have enough gunpowder—but the artillery is dismounted and almost useless ; in a fortnight's time we shall have barely seven gun-carriages.

"The Prince has displayed unheard-of activity in fortifying the river and disposing his men to the best advantage ; the

fatigue, the hardships of the camp, and his anxieties have had an ill effect on his health.

"I even fear for his life, though he says no word of discouragement. If reinforcements are not quickly sent he must be driven to some extremity, even to the abandonment of the Yssel.

"No general could have done more than His Highness, whom I regard every day with more affection, but you must see that with such an inadequate force there is nothing for us but a retreat, since to await the enemy here would be to deliver the Republic to her enemies by exposing her sole defenders to certain destruction.

"His Highness vehemently opposed the abandonment of the Yssel, but being unsupported by any save Count Hornes in his desire for an attack on the French, and hearing of the almost incredible fall of the Rhine fortresses, he has been brought to see that it would be wiser to fall back on Utrecht.

"We lost 1600 men in outposts on the Rhine—100,000 at least would be necessary to hold the Yssel, and we have 20,000, and those disposed in 'echelons' which cannot easily communicate with each other.

"I try to keep up the spirits of those about me. I pray you send me what good news you can that we may not be reduced to despair."

John de Witt raised his prominent brown eyes, and fixed them with a steady and penetrating gaze on M. Fagel.

"What do you say now?"

The Secretary bit his pale lip.

"What can I say?"

He had nothing to oppose to the Grand Pensionary's firm resolution; he was alarmed and unnerved.

John de Witt, absolutely master of himself, spoke again.

"If we are to have a country, Mynheer, the progress of the French must be stopped."

M. Fagel tried to rally.

"Well, cannot we send more levies to His Highness?"

"Not, I fear, in time . . . from Beverningh's letter I think they will abandon the line of the Yssel."

M. Fagel poured himself out another glass of Chablis, and

invited M. de Witt to join him. The Grand Pensionary took the glass mechanically and set it down untasted.

"Cannot we consult the Prince?" asked M. Fagel, who was afraid of offending William and wished to shift the responsibility.

John de Witt saw his motive.

"This is not a matter for the Captain General but for the States," he answered with a stern dignity. "His Highness hath enough to do."

Save by betraying himself as a servile and unpatriotic courtier of the Prince, M. Fagel could resist no more.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Since affairs have come to this extremity, I cannot refuse to help you, Mynheer."

"You will see that His Highness' party offer no opposition in the Assembly?"

"Yes, yes." M. Fagel was still thinking of what the Prince would say.

"Whom do you propose to send?" he asked abruptly.

John de Witt was prepared at all points.

"M. de Groot and M. Van Ghent," he answered at once.

"They are both obnoxious to His Highness," protested M. Fagel.

"They are acceptable to the King of France—and M. de Groot, having been so long in Paris, hath a greater knowledge of French affairs than any man I know."

The Secretary was in some agitation.

"Mynheer," he said, "the Prince hath always disliked M. de Groot——"

John de Witt interrupted—

"For no more worthy reason than that he is a friend of mine and a staunch republican."

M. Fagel answered with some dignity—

"I do not know His Highness' reasons, but he has no love for M. de Groot, and as for M. Van Ghent——"

"M. Van Ghent had the misfortune to be His Highness' tutor; he is, however, a man whom I entirely trust."

M. Fagel was silenced, but by no means reassured. William would certainly never forgive peace proposals being sent to Louis without his wish, and carried, moreover, by the two men whom he most distrusted and disliked.

M. de Witt saw the Secretary's hesitation, and, fearing to lose his support, made a concession.

"I will send with these M. Van Odyk and M. Van Eyck—they are both, I think, in His Highness' favour."

M. Fagel caught at this solution of the difficulty.

"On that understanding, Mynheer, I will second you with all my power in the Assembly—you are going there at once?"

"In a while—I have to write to the Prince and Beverningh."

He picked up his hat and turned to take his leave.

Gaspard Fagel could not fail to admire the patient energy, the proud calm, the unshaken patriotism of the man who was working in the face of such odds; in the face of an invasion of overwhelming strength, domestic dissension, calumny, abuse and dislike from the people he was labouring for with all his noble faculties.

Something generous in the Secretary's commonplace mind was touched.

"You are an example to all of us," he said, and held out his hand.

John de Witt responded instantly—

"Mynheer Fagel, I do my duty, and there are many, thank God, who do the same."

They clasped hands warmly.

"I shall see you in the Assembly?"

"Yes," answered M. Fagel; "and I will make sure, Mynheer, that you are not opposed."

John de Witt took up his letters. He had obtained what he came for; his force and sincerity, aided by the letters from the camp, had turned an opponent into an ally.

M. Fagel accompanied him to the door, then returning to the dining-room opened the shutters on the grey and stormy dawn.

The Assembly met at seven.

He glanced at the clock, and walked up and down with hasty steps, biting his forefinger. He knew that nothing would reconcile William to the offers of peace, and he knew that he would be blamed for ever consenting to aid John de Witt even passively.

He himself would have liked to throw defiance at the French, but the Grand Pensionary had overruled him . . .

The French over the Rhine . . .

He trembled for his country . . .

All the same he must justify himself to the Prince, whose party he represented. He must write to the camp.

He paused thoughtfully by the table and stared absently at John de Witt's untouched glass. He was recalling M. Bentinck's secretary, Van Mander, ardent in the Orange cause, now spending his time in idleness in the deserted Palace; it occurred to him that here was the young man to send to the camp with a letter and explanations.

He blew out the candles and went upstairs to finish dressing.

"The French over the Rhine!" he kept saying to himself.
"And what of de Ruyter?"

CHAPTER VIII

SOLEBAY

THE night was fine but cold; the stars had a hard brilliance and flashed like facets of steel in the cloudless sky.

A man was thoughtfully pacing the deck of a great ship.

Now and again he looked shrewdly up at these stars. A strong but moderate wind was filling the sails and the ship was steering rapidly through the darkness towards the east coast of England.

There was a pleasant whistling in the cordage, and a pleasant, steady swish of the water to right and left as the bows cut through the darkened sea.

When the man turned his back to them he could see great lights dotted irregularly over the black surface of the ocean.

These were the lanterns hanging at the masts of the fleet, silently and closely following its leader.

When he turned again and came under the sparse rays of one of his own lamps, that was fastened a man's height on the mast, he was shown to be a stout, short gentleman with a ruddy face and thick brown hair, very splendidly dressed in scarlet velvet trimmed with gold braid, and wearing a heavy sword in his fringed baldric and a handsome pistol in his belt.

His wide boots were turned over with crimson leather flaps, and on his right shoulder was a bunch of black ribbons.

He carried his red plumed hat under his arm and walked with a slightly swaggering gait.

Pausing for a moment under the lantern he drew out his watch.

Two o'clock.

As he was passing on again a sailor came noiselessly across the deck.

"Mynheer the Admiral, Mynheer Cornelius de Witt would like to speak to you."

"Very well," said de Ruyter, with a little nod, "very well."

The man disappeared into the darkness of the ship.

Michael de Ruyter looked again at the stars, at the lights of his ships, and then went below humming a song in a hoarse, guttural voice.

He found Cornelius de Witt alone in his cabin, seated before a table scattered with papers.

A silver oil-lamp hung by a chain from the ceiling and showed the plain furnishings, which served as a background to the splendid figure of the Ruard.

His strong and handsome features were stern and frowning; the full under-lip and prominent chin, that gave his face its great likeness to his brother's more delicate countenance, were set grimly in his effort to control the pain of the rheumatism that tortured him. Dressed with the magnificence that befitted the dignity of the States, whose sole representative he was with the Fleet, he wore a grey velvet suit embroidered in silver, and a cravat of Mechlin lace tied with a flame-coloured ribbon.

On the wall beside him hung his sword, that swung with the swaying of the ship; on a chest beneath were a couple of richly mounted pistols and a few books and maps.

Admiral de Ruyter paused inside the door, standing with his feet far apart after the fashion of a man accustomed to pitching seas.

"Ah!" said the Ruard, looking up. "Is the wind still favourable?"

"It is," answered Michael de Ruyter. "And unless it falls we shall make the coast of England before morning."

"You do not think they will escape this time?"

"By God's help, no."

The Admiral seated himself on the chest inside the door and looked down at the great crimson rosettes on his boots.

The lamp threw his shadow behind him, bringing into relief his deep-coloured, seamed, and blunt-featured face, that was rendered attractive by the composed, lofty expression and the bright, intelligent black eyes.

"I think we shall meet them at last," he added, with an air of satisfaction.

A week ago Cornelius de Witt had obtained the consent of the States General to his earnest desire for an engagement, and since then the Dutch Fleet had been cruising in search of the combined fleets of France and England, whose junction at Portsmouth they had been unable to prevent.

A bold fishing-boat had brought them news that the enemy was at anchor on the east coast between Harwich and Yarmouth, and silently through the June night the ships of the United Provinces, crowding all canvas, bore forward to battle.

Cornelius de Witt put up his letters, one to his brother and one to his wife.

"I hope to add good news to them—to-morrow," he said, smiling at de Ruyter.

The Admiral pulled at his moustache.

"I have to ask your permission before I attack, you know, Mynheer," he said affectionately. "You have the authority—and the responsibility."

"You know my opinion," was the answer; "nothing but an engagement can save us—I would we were at work on it now—John agrees with me."

"I would like to know how things go on land," said de Ruyter.

A shade passed over the face of Cornelius de Witt.

"Almost I fear to know—with everything trusted to that boy."

Michael de Ruyter nodded sombrely.

"At twenty-one!"

"His years are the least I have against him."

"You do not trust him?"

"No."

"Nor I."

A stern silence fell.

The Ruard was the first to speak—

"We have our own affairs to think of . . . very much lies with us."

The swinging sword made a soft sound against the smooth wall and the lamp swayed on its chain as the great vessel pitched.

"I mean to try a surprise," said Michael de Ruyter.

"That is what I wanted to see you about—you think we can?"

"If the wind does not forsake us."

"They will be unprepared."

"'Tis likely."

"Ay—they can scarce be expecting an attack."

The Ruard's brown eyes flashed.

"To-morrow is King Charles' birthday," answered the Admiral; "the English at least will be engaged in celebrating it . . . we have every chance."

Cornelius de Witt clasped his hands on the table before him.

"If one life could secure the victory——"

Michael de Ruyter looked up.

"I should be very glad to die to-morrow could I see the English sails scatter as I saw them once scatter before us—at Chatham . . . and I think I shall . . . God have mercy on me if I boast."

"We must have victory," said Cornelius de Witt passionately; "there is no 'if,' de Ruyter, we must have victory to-morrow."

"It is quite certain," said de Ruyter simply, "that if we do not make a descent on England they will make a descent on the coast of Zeeland."

He put his hands squarely on his knees and fixed his bright eyes on the representative of the States.

"How many sail do you make them?" asked the Ruard.

Michael de Ruyter checked them off on his stout fingers.

"The English, sixty-five ships of war, sixteen fire-ships, three or four thousand guns, and twenty-two or so thousand men . . .

the French not more than sixty-seven sail, all included, not more than ten thousand men . . . that is the uttermost they can be if their entire force has combined."

Cornelius de Witt was silent. The Fleet of the United Provinces was a hundred and thirty-three sail, including the galiots; they did not carry quite five thousand guns; the men, including five thousand marines, did not exceed twenty-five thousand.

The Ruard cast up these odds. The Admiral seemed to detect some anxiety in his thoughtful face.

"We are in God's hands, Mynheer de Witt, and I cannot think it is His will to forsake us utterly."

Cornelius de Witt made a movement as if to get on his feet. But he could not rise for his crippled limbs, and the momentary effort brought the drops of anguish to his forehead.

"You battle with a sharper foe than the English," said Admiral de Ruyter, with a little frown of sympathy. "Madame de Witt would say you should be in bed."

The Ruard leant forward, supporting himself on the table.

"I am not so ill," he answered, forcing a smile to his pale lips, "that I cannot go on deck to-morrow——"

"Nay, you cannot walk."

"Well, I can be carried——"

"A deputy can take your orders——"

"The Representative of the States General cannot remain in his cabin when the Fleet is in action," replied Cornelius de Witt proudly. "I will go on deck at daybreak."

Michael de Ruyter said no more. Each in silence, and after his own fashion, had dedicated his life to his country.

The light of the swinging lamp shone in the bravery of velvets, gold buttons and braid, the trappings of swords and pistols, and on the calm, resolute faces of the two men who were being borne swiftly on to battle.

De Ruyter rose and opened the porthole.

The expanse of water, almost on a level with his eye, was beginning to glimmer with a greyish tinge.

As the ship dipped to her side the heavy spray splashed in on to the cabin floor.

De Ruyter shut it out.

"The dawn," he said.

He shook hands with Cornelius. They looked into each other's eyes, and without a word from either de Ruyter went up on the deck.

The sea was changing to a silver colour beneath the clear sky of a June dawn, the stars were faintly sparkling through a veil of fast rising mist, the colour of lilac flowers, that lay over the horizon.

Before the flagship lay the stretch of rippling waters and the indefinite, distant line of land; behind her, and to right and left, was the Fleet of the United Provinces, crowding all sail under a pressure of wind and blocking the sky with the straining canvas, the dark masts, and the flags bearing the lions of the Republic.

At many of the bulkheads the lamps still burnt with a pale and useless glare; but as the day strengthened these were extinguished silently like the last stars in the brightening heavens.

The Seven Provinces continued to lead. At four o'clock she sighted the enemy, lying at anchor off the coast of England.

By the maps it appeared that they were nearing Solebay, midway between Yarmouth and Harwich.

De Ruyter sent off boats to summon the principal officers of the Fleet on board his ship, and went himself to tell Cornelius de Witt that the enemy was in view.

Thereupon the Ruard was carried on deck in a chair bearing the arms of the Republic, and placed by the mast in the position of honour and danger.

Out of the hundred men appointed by the States General to attend him, twelve halberdiers were selected now to form a guard.

Armed on back and breast, they took their places about his chair, and the early sun glittered in their steel appointments.

The Ruard was bareheaded; his bandaged legs rested on

a velvet footstool; his sword lay across his knee, and his pistols were in his belt.

In his right hand he held a Bible with gold clasps.

The strong, fresh wind blew his hair across his brow and fluttered the scarlet ribbon that fastened his cravat.

Shielding his eyes with his hand from the glare of sun and water, he fixed his narrowed gaze on the barely visible line of the enemy.

De Ruyter was pacing to and fro with his straddling gait, his hands clasped behind him, and his keen eyes following the movements of the bare-footed sailors who were clearing the decks.

At five o'clock, when the water, under the slackening wind, had subsided to faint ripples that the sun, freed from the obscuring mist, gilded with dazzling light, the captains and principal officers of the Fleet came aboard *The Seven Provinces*.

Among them were many noble volunteers of the finest families of the kingdom, who had placed their services and their fortunes at the disposal of the country.

Michael de Ruyter, the son of the Zeeland brewer's man, received them with simple courtesy.

They shook hands with him, and then with the Ruard, near whose chair he stood.

Every detail of the beautiful ship, and of the magnificently dressed men who stood gathered about her mast, shining gold and silver, velvets, satin, sword-hilts and pistols, eager faces, and bare yellow or brown heads (for they were all uncovered out of respect to Mynheer Cornelius de Witt), was sparkling visibly in the gay sunshine.

Admiral de Ruyter set his feet far apart, and again clasped his gauntleted hands behind him.

"Gentlemen of my fleet," he said, and his quick eyes roved along the line of faces, "we are in the presence of the enemy. It is my intention to give battle. I feel that your courage and your devotion are equal to the difficulty and importance of your task.

"We have to face greater numbers, but on our side is justice, and with God's help we shall not fail.

"The safety of the Country, the liberty of the United Provinces, the fortunes and the lives of their inhabitants depend upon this battle, and only your valour can secure the Republic against the unjust violence of the two kings who attack her."

His pointed moustache seemed to bristle, and there was a fierce, steel-like gleam in his narrowed eyes.

"Well," he added, with a little nod, "get to your work . . . and ask the Lord God, in His mercy, to help us . . . if such be His will."

Cornelius de Witt lifted his noble face.

"What can I add?—your own good courage will direct you—God have you in His keeping, gentlemen."

They bent their heads.

Captain Engel de Ruyter spoke—

"If the enemy were twice as strong, we should have faith, Mynheer, in the justice of our cause, since we fight for liberty and they for glory."

The Ruard and the Admiral shook hands with them all a second time, and they returned to their ships; silent and seemingly unmoved, as was the habit of their nation.

With all speed possible the Fleet of the United Provinces was beating to windwards, but the strong breeze had dropped, and de Ruyter no longer hoped for a surprise.

The enemy had already seen them, and were hastily arranging themselves for battle. So utterly unprepared were they that in the confusion many of the English ships had to cut their cables to place themselves in line.

De Ruyter, on the forecastle, saw this, and his lips stiffened. The superiority of the enemy sent a thrill of pleasurable excitement through his veins.

He was a just and honourable man, well fitted to serve under John de Witt, and all his indomitable energies were roused by the wanton aggression of the King of England. Had he not commenced attack like a pirate by attempting to capture the India fleet before war was declared, and, in

violation of the treaty between England and the United Provinces, by seizing all the Dutch merchant-ships in English ports?

John de Witt had disdained to revenge himself for this perfidy, as he had disdained to answer Charles' frivolous pretexts for war, and every English vessel had gone free according to the agreement the United Provinces were too proud to break.

It was an example of the different spirit animating the two Governments. The Dutch were upheld by every noble feeling patriotism may call forth; they fought for the finest of motives, for the most glorious of ends: the English, ashamed of their leaders, hating the alliance with the French, whose cats'-paws they suspected themselves to be, sullen at the unworthy part they felt themselves to be filling, had no motive to acquit themselves well save mere desire for reprisals on a country that had already once beaten them off the sea.

Michael de Ruyter was alive to this difference of spirit in the two forces about to meet.

Calling his men on to the quarter-deck, he pressed their advantage, warmly exhorting every one to do his best in a noble cause, and assuring them, out of the depth of his own strong, simple faith, of God's help in their utmost endeavours.

The men, devoted to their Admiral and the finest seamen in the world, responded with a cheerful enthusiasm that was the outward expression of undaunted purpose and courage.

Each went to his place; the swivel guns on the top of the forecastle and quarter-deck bulwarks were swung to front the enemy; the eager, half-nude gunners knelt before the long guns on the main and quarter-decks and below the smooth muzzles pointed from the portholes.

The standard of the Republic floated stiffly out from the mainmast of *The Seven Provinces*, vivid in the sunshine.

Cornelius de Witt raised his eyes to it and murmured a prayer.

The hammocks were lashed to the nettings, and behind

them the marines, with their muskets in their hands, took up their position.

By now the wanton English breeze had changed again and a high sea was running. De Ruyter gave the order to reef in topsails.

They were almost within range of the Allied Fleet, who had now drawn themselves up into line of battle, divided into three squadrons: two English, the first of the Red, commanded by the Lord High Admiral of England, James of York, the King's brother; the second, called the Blue, by Vice-Admiral the Earl of Sandwich.

The third squadron, the White, comprised the French ships under the Count D'Estrées, Vice-Admiral of France; his second in command, Lieutenant Admiral Duquesne.

De Ruyter also arranged his forces into three; Lieutenant Admiral Banckert advanced towards the French ships on the left, and Lieutenant Admiral Van Ghent was opposed to the Earl of Sandwich on the right wing.

De Ruyter, seconded by Lieutenant Admiral Van Nes, took the central position facing the Duke of York's division, commanded by James himself on his flagship *The Royal Prince*.

The Dutch Fleet shortened sail; the useless canvas was furled. De Ruyter gave the signal for battle, and the colours of the United Provinces ran up on every yardarm. From the Duke's flagship floated the royal red standard of England, and from the great vessel that had D'Estrées on board the Bourbon blue with the yet unconquered lilies semé on the azure ground.

Michael de Ruyter walked up to his pilot Zegen.

It was then nearly eight o'clock of a beautiful June day; not a cloud visible, and the deep green water curling into foam about the bows of the advancing vessels.

Above the cordage flew circling sea-birds, the sunlight on their wings and breasts.

De Ruyter pointed out *The Royal Prince* to the pilot.

"Zegen," he said in his quiet voice, "that is our man."

The pilot lifted his cap.

"Admiral," he said calmly, "you shall have him."

And he steered *The Seven Provinces* straight for the Duke of York's flagship.

There was a moment's pause, of heightened calm it seemed, during which was no sound save the harsh scream of a seagull and the splash of the waves curling over one another.

Then the guns leapt into a roar.

A furious broadside came from the 18-pounders of *The Seven Provinces*; the shots tore the water into foam and buried themselves in the side of *The Royal Prince*, who returned an instant cannonade.

A thick smoke, a heavy dun in colour, at once wrapped both vessels; to the right rang a second roar as Van Ghent engaged Lord Sandwich, and to the left the answering boom of the French cannon.

The two flagships were now close-hauled, and the Dutch opened a hot fire of musketry from behind their hammocks. Theirs being the higher vessel, they were able to inflict on the English a galling volley of small shot that raked their exposed decks.

Aware of this disadvantage, *The Royal Prince* tried to get out of her opponent's reach, but the light wind would not serve her, and de Ruyter brought about a collision, driving the port bow of *The Seven Provinces* into the enemy's starboard side.

The English marines on the poop commenced a steady fire of musketry, but the Dutch 36-pounders tore a hole in their enemy's close-pressed side and the deck guns crippled her masts.

The smoke was already so thick that the sky was entirely obscured; the stifling vapour was rent across by the flashes of fire from the guns and the fresh spurts of white smoke that followed each shot.

The roar of the great cannon below was incessant; splinters flew from each ship, and the planks of the Dutch vessel became so heated with her own cannonade that seamen had to stand ready with buckets of water to extinguish the flames.

As the enemy was so close in their embrace the Dutch from

the nettings kept up a continuous fire that picked off numbers of the English crew, while the swivel guns on the fore-castle heavily raked the enemy's masts and rigging.

Michael de Ruyter, walking up and down the upper deck giving his orders, stopped beside the chair of Cornelius de Witt.

The air was foul with the smell of powder, and they could hardly hear each other for the thunder of the guns.

"How long will she hold out, Admiral?" asked the Ruard.

"I think she will be badly beaten in a very little while," answered de Ruyter, with his thumbs in his embroidered sash.

The musketry fire was playing round Cornelius de Witt, but he did not even seem to notice it. A ball had buried itself in the deck a few inches from the stool where his bandaged feet rested; two of his guards had already fallen, been carried to the rails by the silent survivors and flung overboard.

Blood began to appear everywhere; on the smooth planks, on the gay clothes of the officers, on the naked, glistening bodies of the gunners.

Several of the marines lay heavily over useless muskets in the nettings, their bodies jerking helplessly with the swaying of the ship. On the lower deck others remained where they had fallen, mostly on their faces, with the red stain spreading underneath them.

A gentle breeze rose and drove off *The Royal Prince* after nearly an hour of furious firing.

The English ship had suffered severely; her spars had gone; her sides were driven in, her foremast and fore-topmast had been shot away, and many of her guns were dismounted.

De Ruyter had lost only his mizzen-topmast and one of the lower yards, and of his crew comparatively few; but the dead could be seen piled high on the English ship.

Encouraged by the sight of the enemy, the Dutch turned on her another fierce cannonade that swept off her mizzen-mast and battered her hulls.

This time the English guns did not answer, and a low murmur of triumph went up from *The Seven Provinces*.

Her cannon impeded by her own falling spars, half the gunners down—dead and dying entangled in the rigging that lay along the deck, *The Royal Prince* was utterly unmanageable; her pilot could do nothing with her, she lay helpless, a tattered shape looming through the heavy smoke.

Her mainmast still stood, and there the red standard of England, riddled with shot, floated above the battle.

It was now nine o'clock. De Ruyter gave orders for another broadside.

It was replied to by a feeble volley from the English ship, now pitching uselessly; the mainmast swayed, then crashed down, dragging the cordage and remaining canvas with it. Smoke began to belch through her portholes, and to complete her distress one of the 12-pounders blew up, killing several of the crew and firing the side.

"She is finished," said de Ruyter, standing behind his pilot; and as the Royal Standard fell the hoarse shouts of victory rose from the decks of *The Seven Provinces*.

The Royal Prince tried now to withdraw, but was prevented by the other vessels of de Ruyter's squadron; they closed round her and sent out fire-ships to complete her destruction.

The sea was scattered with wreckage, and stained with trails of blood and flecks of foam; the curtain of smoke concealed the rest of the battle, but the continuous sound of the guns and the splashes of flame in the darkness testified to its fierceness.

Michael de Ruyter, on the forecastle, saw a boat put out from *The Royal Prince* and struggle through the dipping bullets that lashed the water into spray; it lay-to at one of the portholes, and a man in a blue coat stepped out and took his place in the stern sheet.

He carried the standard that had just been disentangled from the bloody deck.

"It is the Duke of York," said Admiral de Ruyter, narrowing his keen eyes. "Steer away from *The Royal Prince*, Zegen, for they have abandoned the flagship!"

The little Dutch galiots ran out, crowding all canvas, and

trying to reach the cock-boat in which the Lord High Admiral of England was conveying his flag across the firing line.

They could see the English sailors straining at the oars, and the Prince himself ducking under the bullets, one of which flattened itself against the bows of his boat.

The utter calm delayed the fire-ships; the English boat escaped into the smoke, and about half-past nine, with a blare of trumpets, the English flag was rehoisted aboard *The Saint Michael*.

The Royal Prince, on fire in three places, an abandoned and drifting wreck, collided with one of her own galiots, and instant flames involved them both in a common doom. Such as remained of her crew threw themselves into the sea, clinging desperately to broken spars and planks, while the pale fire leapt, hissing, to the height of her fallen mast, and stained the sombre smoke with sparks and flying fragments as gun after gun, and cask after cask of gunpowder, exploded at the touch of the flames.

The Seven Provinces steered off from the floating mischief, and silencing with a sweep of her guns the circle of English fire-ships that surrounded her, went for *The Saint Michael*.

An officer came on board from Captain Engel de Ruyter's ship to say that the captain was disabled by a dangerous wound, and the vessel sinking with six holes in her side; being beset with the enemy's fire-ships.

"Keep the flag flying," said de Ruyter, and turned his course to his son's assistance.

Van Nes having, after a fierce fight, lost one of his ships, and being forced to retreat with his hull cut to pieces and nothing standing but the mainmast and the shattered remains of the bowsprit, had patched his vessel together, and returning to the fight seconded de Ruyter in an attack on *The Royal Catherine*, a ship of eighty guns that was menacing Engel de Ruyter. A Dutch fire-ship was dispatched and a broadside fired full into the hulls of *The Royal Catherine*, whose jib-

boom and wheel were at the same time shot away by a discharge from *The Seven Provinces*.

Her deck guns were now abandoned, a fierce fusillade from the starboard guns was directed into the bows of the English vessel, and the two ships crashed together, starboard to starboard.

The Dutch attempted to board, and a desperate hand-to-hand fight between the two decks ensued ; Van Nes leading his men with cutlass and pistol, and Captain John Chicheley, of *The Royal Catherine*, fiercely urging his crew forward.

The Seven Provinces, holding off a little, sent a volley into the English ship that blew the bottom out of her and ended the struggle.

Engel de Ruyter's rescued ship withdrew from the firing line for repairs, and *The Royal Catherine*, fast sinking, surrendered to Van Nes, who received her crew as prisoners and took possession.

De Ruyter again turned his attention to *The Saint Michael*, she the while keeping up a murderous cannonade on the frigates opposed by the Dutch.

The sharp, short rattle of musketry was heard above the steady roar of the great guns, and little threads of flame and puffs of white smoke sprang out and vanished against the curtain of yellow fog as the marines on board *The Seven Provinces*, under cover of the nets, picked off the sailors in the rigging of *The Saint Michael*.

Two other high Dutch vessels, looming up out of the noise and darkness of battle, silenced the starboard guns of the English flagship with a close-range volley ; her poop was swept bare with a cannonade from de Ruyter, and her disabled rigging and rent canvas swayed through the smoke that belched on her from all sides.

For the second time the English standard fell.

De Ruyter strove to press his advantage, and sent out two frigates to sink or burn *The Saint Michael* ; but her pilot and captain brilliantly managed the wounded vessel, and, wreck as she was, steered her out of the line of battle.

Again the Duke of York was forced to abandon his ship; again he was rowed through the wreckage, the seething, stained sea, and the ragged flag was hoisted on *The London*.

De Ruyter, having vanquished those ships immediately in duel with him, turned his attention to the other parts of the battle.

The French Fleet, beaten in a first engagement, and wishing to leave the brunt of the battle to their allies, had withdrawn towards the south, hotly pursued by Van Banckert, whose distant guns could be heard in the lulls of the nearer firing.

Van Ghent had begun the fight on the left wing with a fury that had brought the Squadron of the Blue to retreat in confusion and terror; but as de Ruyter was fighting his way through a circle of fire-ships to second him, a young lieutenant came up in a little galiot and announced to Cornelius de Witt that Admiral Van Ghent was dead. In the midst of his victorious onset he had been killed by a cannon-ball.

A captain of marines was with the lieutenant; he had his arm in a sling and a mark of blood across his face.

"Conceal Van Ghent's death," said the Ruard. "Keep his flag flying and return to the fight—the day goes well for us."

A ball had carried away one arm of his chair; three more of his guards had fallen, and the deck was smeared with blood and burnt with powder to his very feet; behind him, leaning against the mast, a dying boy sat staring at a fingerless hand he held across his up-drawn knees.

The sea was rising and the ship began to toss, pitching the dead to and fro on the slippery decks. De Ruyter stood beside the Ruard's chair, his feet far apart, and gave directions in a firm voice.

The captain, advancing for instructions, had his arm shattered by a shot that splintered the mast; he went below to the dark cabin where the surgeon was at work, and returned to take his orders with an empty sleeve pinned across his breast.

The London opened an obstinate fire, and de Ruyter

answered, leaving the left wing to manage the Squadron of the Blue.

They, not receiving the expected signal from Van Ghent's ship, had given the English time to recover from the first shock of the onslaught; the Earl of Sandwich, on board *The Royal James*, his flagship, rallied his force and advanced in order of battle.

It was now past midday, and though the advantage had been so far with the Dutch the English gave no signs of yielding.

De Ruyter signalled to Vice-Admiral Sweers to take over the command of the left division, and make a decisive attack on the Blue.

But there was one Dutchman who waited for no signal; Captain Van Brakel of *The City of Groningen*, the hero of the victory of Chatham. Ardently desirous further to distinguish himself, he conceived the boldly audacious scheme of capturing or destroying *The Royal James* himself.

Defying all discipline, he left, without orders, de Ruyter's squadron, to which he belonged, and advanced to *The Royal James* across the black pool of waters the battle enclosed. The exploit was daring to recklessness, for the English ship carried 102 guns and 900 men, while his little vessel was only armed with 70 guns and 300 men.

An angry broadside from the great ship met her rash foe; Captain Van Brakel approached without replying.

The Royal James, alarmed at this manœuvre, spread her topsails and tried to sheer off; but Van Brakel was too quick. He hauled his wind, drew up alongside the English, threw out his grappling irons and seized her, while his quarter-deck guns blew away her cordage and rigging.

Despite *The Royal James'* desperate efforts the two ships remained locked together. There was a rush of Dutch to the sides, an answering charge on the part of the English, and the crews mingled in a fierce hand-to-hand fight with muskets, pistols, swords, and even sticks and fragments of iron.

Van Brakel, regardless of a broken collar-bone and a cut on his forehead that blinded him, led his men himself.

The sheer Anglo-Saxon genius for fighting rose in the English; let their cause be good or bad they could not have fought more fiercely.

The Earl of Sandwich, with a broken sword in his hand, and panting a little by reason of his stoutness, ran up with his officers.

"Don't let the damned Dutchmen board!" he shouted, and a yell of fury rose to answer him.

The Netherlands, silent but equally in earnest, pressed over the bodies of their comrades and closed with the English on the deck of their own ship, clinging to the rails, the grappling irons, even to the guns, some of which many succeeded in ramming under the very eyes of the gunners.

Meanwhile their own cannon kept up a steady fire; the Dutch gunners remaining at their places in face of a cruel discharge from the deck guns of *The Royal James*.

Man after man fell as he was putting the match to the powder and lay silently gasping his life out; but there was never lack of another to take his place. The dwindling crew moved forward as the gaps occurred, and *The City of Groningen's* guns were never silent.

The Royal James was suffering severely; her masts were tottering, her sails hanging in ribbons. All Lord Sandwich's efforts were directed to a frantic attempt to disengage her; but still the little Dutch vessel clung to her side, still the guns poured their fire into her with unabated vigour.

At half-past one, after the duel had lasted an hour and a half, the English masts went overboard on the disengaged side, dragging the Admiral's flag into the sea. The guns on the fore-castle and quarter-deck were put out of action by the fallen canvas, the mizzen-topsail going over the portholes and becoming involved with the Dutch grappling irons.

The City of Groningen had done enough; battered, half her crew dead, and all her officers wounded, she changed her tactics and withdrew, cutting her chains, and signalled up her fire-ships.

The Royal James was in no condition to resist another

onslaught ; not a mast standing, her jib-boom and wheel shot away, her decks piled with dead and wreckage, many of her guns silenced, she lay a huge, useless hulk.

But the Earl of Sandwich was still aboard her and from her bows still floated the English flag.

Vice-Admiral Sweers hastened up to the aid of the heroic Van Brakel, under the cover of whose guns the fire-ships were advancing.

But Lord Sandwich opened a last desperate cannonade ; one fire-ship was sunk, the other driven back on *The City of Groningen*. Van Brakel, wounded three times, but with his rash valour utterly unquenched, again brought his disabled ship forward, urging on the fire-ship, which was commanded by Van Ryn, the captain who had burnt *The Rochester* at Chatham.

Lord Sandwich could no longer save himself. Protected by the Dutch guns, Van Ryn advanced right under the bows of *The Royal James*, and succeeded in firing the canvas that hung over her portholes, retreating uninjured.

The flames seemed to crouch and hesitate for a moment, then leapt fiercely on to the piled-up wreckage of rigging and cordage.

The City of Groningen steered off her dangerous foe, and the gallant little fire-ship hastened from the reach of the ruin she had caused.

There was no hope for *The Royal James*.

Cries of angry despair rose from the English as they saw themselves abandoned in flaming isolation, and they might be seen rushing to the boats and endeavouring, under the captain's orders, to flood the powder magazine. The flames twisted over the quarter-deck, feeding greedily on the broken masts, the tattered canvas, and the oaken planks.

"Lord Sandwich's flagship is burning !"

As the news spread the very battle seemed hushed to watch the death agony of the great vessel.

Van Brakel, lying wounded on his deck, gave orders for the firing to cease, and bade his crew save such of the English as

they could. But their boats had been shot to splinters ; they could do nothing.

Vice-Admiral Sweers sent a pinnace to the rescue, but it made slow progress through the clogged and swelling sea.

Meanwhile the fire was encroaching over every portion of *The Royal James*. The soldiers and sailors began to hurl themselves into the sea. It was but a choice of deaths ; most were instantly drowned in the waves their flaming ship stained with a crimson reflection.

One after another the red-hot guns exploded with a blaze of white flame, and from every porthole issued dark, slow smoke from the wet powder.

The Dutch threw out ropes and broken spars to the few desperate survivors who swam towards them. The captain, bitterly wounded, and a young lieutenant, were hauled on board *The City of Groningen* ; the first fainted as he reached the enemy's deck, and the other, flinging back his wet hair, gazed at his burning ship.

"Where is my lord ?" he asked. "Where is the Admiral ?"

A crowded boat put out from *The Royal James*, and the Dutch pinnace tried to reach it ; but numbers of drowning wretches striving frantically to cling to its sides, it became waterlogged and sank under the rescuers' gaze.

Then those who watched with straining eyes saw the Vice-Admiral of England, in his courtier's dress, advance out of the smoke and mount up to the untouched portion of the ship where the flag still floated ; Lord Montague, his son, was with him. The English knew him by his gold coat and scarlet sash ; he had his useless sword in his hand, and set his back against the flagstaff, facing the advancing flames.

A heavy swell troubled the sea ; *The Royal James* swung about as if she writhed, and the flames swept windward, blowing over the battle like an enormous banner of a vivid, transparent whiteness, edged with leaping tongues of crimson that licked into the smoky background.

The crew of *The City of Groningen* could see the Earl of

Sandwich calmly placed beside his flag; could see his son drop his sword and put his hand over his eyes.

The fire darted on with a sinister roar; it was the last seen of my Lord Sandwich. . . . The ship was burning to the water's edge; the hull dipped as if the tortured vessel strove to quench her agony in the blood-stained waves; the English flag fluttered a moment, then disappeared in fire.

The powder being wet there was no explosion; she burnt slowly, pitilessly, to ashes, till at length the flames rose sheer from the sea and sank reluctantly to nothingness above their annihilated prey.

At the end of an hour the waves had closed over the fragments of *The Royal James*, and the fire hissed sullenly along floating planks and overturned boats.

"I would I could have saved my lord Admiral," said Captain Van Brakel.

"He did not choose to be saved," answered the lieutenant fiercely.

It was now seven o'clock, and all heart had left the English; the terrific end of the Earl of Sandwich had utterly daunted the Squadron of the Blue.

The Duke of York alone still kept up an obstinate fight, and, aided by a veering wind, strove to drive his fire-ships against *The Seven Provinces*.

De Ruyter, abandoned by the daring Van Brakel, and separated from his second in command, Van Nes, having no vessels with him but a yacht and a frigate, was for a while hard pressed by the obstinate fire kept up by *The London* and the advance of the English fire-ships. His own boats having been sunk he had nothing with which to ward off their approach.

Michael de Ruyter saw himself in an ugly situation. For a moment it seemed as if he was doomed to the same fate as Admiral the Earl of Sandwich, and Cornelius de Witt was about to order the pumps to be turned on the powder magazine when the little frigate, under the command of the intrepid Captain Philip D'Almonde, resolved to sacrifice herself to save the flagship.

Followed closely by the yacht, she advanced on the fire-ships. The first ran into her bows and fired her; but the heroic efforts of Captain D'Almonde extinguished the flames, and a sharp volley from his guns set light to the powder the enemy carried, and she was borne off helpless before the wind and pitched against *The London*, that had to retreat before her.

The other fire-ship, seeing the fate of its companion, lost heart and turned aside, held at bay by the yacht, whose crew raked it with a fire of musketry.

The Seven Provinces was saved. In the time gained by the action of the frigate, Van Nes had forced his way through the squadrons of the Red; and the ships surrounding de Ruyter, placed between two fires, beat a hasty retreat.

Van Nes, having rescued the flagship, went to the aid of his brother, Rear-Admiral John Van Nes, who was engaged with the remaining ships of the Blue division.

The Duke of York, loath to give in, hastened to the assistance of the English, and courageously continued to fight from his third battered flagship.

But the English were dispirited and weary, and after three broadsides from the advancing Dutch they dispersed in sullen confusion; falling back, with tattered canvas and disabled rigging, on to their own coast.

Banckert, returning from his pursuit of the French, came up with his fleet as evening fell, and his appearance changed the retreat of the English into a flight; nightfall alone saved them from utter destruction.

After twelve hours of fierce and desperate fighting the States General had achieved a glorious victory.

They had destroyed five of the enemy's finest vessels, including the two flagships, disabled many others, and were themselves the worse only by two frigates and some fire-ships.

The English had lost three thousand men, and a large number had been taken prisoner.

"It is God's will," was all Michael de Ruyter said.

He stood beside the heroic Ruard's chair; his hands clasped behind him, his lips compressed under his pointed moustache.

Cornelius de Witt was very pale ; he leant against the back of his chair, and now and then wiped his lips and his brow. But though fatigue and pain drove the colour from his face, nothing could subdue the fire of his eye or the undaunted carriage of his head.

He had seen six of his guard fall beside him, and been all day exposed to the hottest fire of the enemy. The Admiral's ship had been always in the fiercest part of the battle.

For twelve hours Cornelius de Witt had listened to the thunder of the cannon and watched the smoke and flame arising from the struggle.

Now, in the hour of victory, he simply thanked God, and slipped his sword into its scabbard.

The sailors were carrying the wounded below, throwing the dead overboard, and washing the decks.

The stars came out, pale gold and luminous, and a gentle wind played with the drooping canvas.

On a hundred ships the lanterns gleamed at mast and prow, and from a hundred decks arose a service of thanksgiving.

"The Lord be praised !" said Cornelius de Witt.

The lieutenant who had escaped from *The Royal James*, and who had been brought on board the flagship as a prisoner, was amazed at all that he saw : at the discipline among the large, silent sailors, at the dexterous fashion in which they cleaned the ship that had started that morning fresh as a lady's chamber, at their care of the wounded and their respect to M. de Witt and de Ruyter, and, most of all, at their gathering on the quarter-deck, where every man, even to the pilot behind his shining brass rails, joined in a strong and lusty singing of psalms that Michael de Ruyter selected from his leathern Prayer-book.

"They are an extraordinary people," the Englishman wrote home. "M. de Ruyter is everything in one—admiral, captain, pilot, sailor, soldier, and preacher, too, it seems . . ."

Now that the last shot had been fired, and the song of thanksgiving sent up by all, no matter to which of the seven sects he belonged, and the blue-eyed sailors were mending

the sails and tarring the holes in the boats, Cornelius de Witt was carried below, and before touching food or drink added to the letter to his brother the news of the victory.

He wrote briefly and modestly, and concluded with these words, written with a hand shaking with sickness and fatigue—

"I am of opinion that we should begin again as soon as possible; I hope God will grant us the strength necessary for continuing to the death to do service to my dear country."

CHAPTER IX

THE EMBASSY OF M. DE GROOT

"FROM M. Fagel," said Florent in a tired voice, showing his passport.

The officer summoned by the sentry nodded.

"You had best see M. Beverningh," he said. "His Highness has gone to inspect the fortifications of Amersfoort."

Florent followed him through the encampment silently

The Prince, who had been forced to abandon the Yssel, had gathered his troops on to the high district of Rutten before Amersfoort and Utrecht, so as to defend the entry to the States of Holland.

Florent looked to right and left of him, and wondered at the quiet and order. The wild and vague reports of the war, its sieges, disasters, retreats, current at the Hague, had not prepared him for this monotonous expanse of tents and wooden shelters, through which little groups of men and horses moved without noise.

It was hazy afternoon; the sunshine was thick and yellow like honey over the canvas, the trampled ground, and the distant belt of dark trees, beyond which, on a slight incline, rose a windmill with sluggish sails and a thatch stained golden.

The warm air seemed to wrap the sound of things close by with a sense of distance: the fierce, sweet song of a lark that hovered a few feet up, the jangle of the harness as the horses tossed their heads, the crackling of twigs as one man lit a fire at his tent door, came faintly through the veil of the languid summer haze.

Florent and his companion traversed the encampment and made their way across a strip of meadow to a red-tiled farm with green cowsheds adjoining, neat white curtains at the windows.

"The Deputies are staying here," explained the officer.

"My message was to the Prince."

"Well, you can see M. Beverningh," answered the other, as if it were much the same thing.

In the beautifully kept garden, filled with stocks, pinks, and gillyflowers, a maid in a blue gown was scouring brass pans; seeing them approach she stood up hastily and wiped her bare arms, wind and sun-coloured to a deep rose.

"Tell M. Beverningh there is a gentleman here from the Hague."

She gave a great courtesy and hastened into the house, her gold head ornaments tinkling.

Florent Van Mander stole a furtive glance at the officer, who stood contemplating, with unmoved face, a precise bed of striped stocks and southernwood.

Florent wondered what his thoughts were. He longed to ask him concerning the advance of the French, and what his feelings were about the loss of the fortresses on the Rhine and the Yssel, but both his own reserve and the officer's demeanour came in his way.

So he too gazed at the flowers, and the brass pans shining in the sun, and a fat white cat asleep on the window-sill.

The girl, reappearing, announced in a hushed, respectful voice that M. Beverningh had come down into the parlour and would see them there.

They entered a passage flagged with black and white, and turned into a room at the back of the house.

Florent was aware of a gentleman standing before the fireplace with his head bent on one side.

"Mynheer," said the officer, "this is Mynheer Van Mander, sent by Mynheer Fagel to His Highness—as His Highness has not yet returned from Amersfoort I brought him to you."

"Very good," said Jerome Beverningh. "Will you please sit down, Mynheer?"

The officer saluted and withdrew.

Florent Van Mander took the chair within the door, and turned his gaze critically upon the delegate of the States of Holland.

He saw a slight man with a hooked nose, a thin mouth, and a stooping figure, dressed richly but carelessly in prune-coloured velvet. He held his hands behind him, and regarded his visitor with large, intelligent brown eyes.

"You are from M. Fagel?"

"Yes, Mynheer."

Florent felt weary and unreasonably depressed. The incongruity with his feelings of the neat farmhouse parlour, furnished with curtains and hangings of blue-and-white checked stuff, its bright pictures and highly polished furniture, its white glazed hearth and tiled floor, gave him unreasonable annoyance.

He had been greatly elated at the Secretary's choice of him for a messenger; but he wished to see the Prince, not the representative of the States of Holland.

And the news of growing, almost hopeless, disaster that had met him on his way filled him, against himself, with disgust.

"Well," asked Jerome Beverningh, "what has M. Fagel to say?"

The young man hesitated.

"I know," continued the other, remarking it, "that you have come to His Highness, but I think that you may safely speak to me."

"My errand is no secret," said Florent, but still half reluctantly.

The representative of Holland smiled.

"And I am in the Prince's confidence."

He crossed slowly to a beeswaxed table by the window that held his handsome writing-case and silver ink-horn, and seated himself in a rush-bottomed chair.

"It comes to this." Van Mander spoke with sudden

bluntness. "M. de Witt heard of the passage of the Rhine. 'Half the Republic is lost!' he cried when they told him Wesel had fallen—this, for all his self-control . . . and the next day in council he induced Their High Mightinesses to send an embassy to the King of France."

"Hah!" exclaimed Jerome Beverningh, stroking his chin.

In some subtle way Florent was encouraged to speak openly; the touch of sullenness left his manner.

"M. Fagel was won over—M. de Witt carried everything before him—no one dare resist him in face of the advance of the French. M. Van Ghent, M. de Groot, and M. Van Odyk are being sent to King Louis——"

"And M. Fagel sent you on an attempt to justify himself to the Prince?" remarked Jerome Beverningh shrewdly.

"Yes, Mynheer."

"Certainly this news will not please His Highness."

"M. Fagel feared so."

Jerome Beverningh twisted his thin mouth.

"He risks His Highness' favour. Was he—frightened?"

"M. de Witt, I think, over-persuaded him."

"And M. de Witt is the head of the Government," was the dry answer.

"Though every day more unpopular, Mynheer."

"But he had the Assembly with him in this?"

"He carried all before him, Mynheer; there was scarcely a protest."

"When His Highness is out of it M. de Witt is the strongest man in the Hague," remarked Jerome Beverningh. "He can do what he pleases, methinks, despite his unpopularity. Is *he* not sending some one to acquaint us with this news?"

"The envoys themselves, Mynheer, are to explain their mission; I believe they will soon be at the camp. It was M. Fagel's wish that I should anticipate them with His Highness——"

M. Beverningh interrupted pleasantly—

"And soften the news? M. Fagel is wise."

"He seemed agitated, Mynheer, that he had been forced to support M. de Witt, and anxious not to slip in His Highness' good graces—I have a letter from him."

The elder man swung round on his chair, he looked little and stooping but his eyes were calm and clever.

"You have heard news of the war?" he demanded briskly.

"What every one has heard, yes," answered Florent.

"Mostly disasters?"

"Mostly disasters, Mynheer."

"And you, like M. de Witt, have been discouraged?"

Florent shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not say so."

"But you think that peace would be desirable, eh?"

"I think we must have peace or conquest, Mynheer."

"Well," said Jerome Beverningh thoughtfully, "M. de Witt is a clever man, but he will never conclude a peace while the Prince has any influence in the United Provinces."

Florent was interested.

"His Highness is so against it?"

"Were His Highness in power there would be no embassy sent to King Louis."

M. Beverningh spoke in a pleasant, quiet manner; as if he touched on matters of general interest that did not personally concern either himself or his listener. He made a great semblance of frankness, yet most effectually concealed his own feelings and views.

Florent liked him; he felt emboldened to speak much more freely than was his wont.

"The peace proposals are not popular at the Hague either, Mynheer. The people choose to take it as an attempt to sell them to the French, and M. de Witt is daily attacked in the pamphlets."

"Ah, we are a nation of pamphleteers and medallists—we have all been assailed in turn. M. de Witt hath more serious things to trouble him than libels." M. Beverningh changed his tone. "You marvel to hear the representative

of the Government speak so openly, Mynheer Van Mander—but I am His Highness' friend."

Florent was surprised; he stared at the calm, wrinkled face of Jerome Beverningh, without comment.

"If any one can save the country it will be the Prince," Beverningh continued.

"He has a hard task," said Florent.

"For most men an impossible one, but His Highness is not of the common make, he has great gifts—above all the gift of command."

"Is he popular in the army?" asked Florent.

"He alone keeps the army together; the men are under-paid, under-fed, yet the cavalry do the work of the infantry, the officers will dig trenches and make gun-carriages—and there is no complaint, because of the Prince."

"The news of the battle of Solebay heartened them?" suggested Florent, mentioning the one success that had attended the Dutch flag since the beginning of this disastrous war.

"A little—but the issue lies on land—His Highness was not enthusiastic."

"Ah, M. de Witt was with the Fleet!"

"Exactly. It was a victory for the Republic not for the Orange flag, and His Highness does not love M. de Ruyter, both because he is a friend to the MM. de Witt and because he is of common birth."

"Why—does that trouble him?"

Jerome Beverningh rose.

"Be not deceived by simple manners," he said. "His Highness is the very proudest man I have ever met, and if he does not flaunt it in the Tamerlane fashion of his Christian Majesty, it strikes root the deeper for that."

As he spoke he put his papers into his writing-case and locked it.

"We will see if His Highness has not returned from Amersfoort . . . it were better if you could give him M. Fagel's letter before M. de Witt's envoys arrive."

M. Beverningh picked up his black beaver with the purple feather, and preceded Florent out of the farm into the sweet-smelling garden of stocks and pinks.

As they crossed the quiet camp, respectfully saluted by such soldiers as they passed, M. Beverningh spoke, in his easy, judicial way, of the deficiencies of the army, the lack of gun-carriages, the forced levies of peasants who had nothing but their goodwill to recommend them, and the number of foreigners, Scotch, Irish, and Swedes, in the army, and how these were by no means to be trusted; indeed, it was to the presence of these hired soldiers that the fall of the Rhine fortresses was attributed.

"Netherlanders," said M. Beverningh, "do not open their gates to the enemy without a blow."

He added that the Prince, though struggling with ill-health and disappointment, was beyond all praise in the way in which he kept his army disciplined, faithful, and, despite his constant reverses, encouraged. The captains who had surrendered Wesel to the French had joined the camp, and the Prince had instantly dismissed them his service—"for so strangely forgetting their duty."

"M. de Montbas' division comes up with us to-day," concluded M. Beverningh. "We shall see what welcome His Highness gives him; he allowed the French to cross the Rhine—without a blow."

Florent raised his brows.

"Would His Highness dare—with his restricted authority—to reprimand M. de Montbas?"

"We shall see," repeated Jerome Beverningh dryly.

As they reached the tents the Deputy of Holland pointed out the one belonging to the Prince, and at the moment a blonde gentleman in grey advanced from it to meet them.

At sight of M. Beverningh's companion he gave a surprised smile.

"M. Van Mander!"

It was Matthew Bromley

Florent flushed.

"I am from the Hague——"

M. Beverningh cut him short—

"Has His Highness returned?"

"No—I was coming to find you or one of the other Deputies——"

"Why?"

Matthew Bromley half laughed.

"Why, there are two of His Highness' mortal enemies waiting for him—M. de Groot and M. Van Ghent—accompanied by M. Van Odyk and a posse of secretaries."

"Where are they?"

"Count Struym brought them to the Prince's tent."

M. Beverningh looked at Florent.

"Why, then, you are too late," he said, and walked ahead with rapid steps.

The Prince's tent was large, and divided by a dark curtain. The outer half was furnished with a few chairs, a table, and a chest, beside which lay some armour and a black cloak.

The grass before it was not yet worn away, and one flap being lifted a flood of heavy sunshine poured in through the open square.

Here M. Beverningh found M. Van Ghent, pale, and in mourning, M. de Groot, elegant, calm, but anxious, in converse with M. Ripperda de Buryse, the Deputy for Guelders, and M. Crommon, the representative of Zeeland.

Standing apart was M. Van Odyk, very handsomely attired.

Since M. Van Eyck had been objected to by the State of Groningen, he alone represented the Prince's party in the embassy.

M. Beverningh greeted them all impartially.

Matthew Bromley and Florent entered behind him, the Englishman dragging news of the Hague from his slow companion.

The steady sound of low, earnest voices filled the tent.

Only William Van Odyk stood silent, staring at the ground.

It was very quiet without; so quiet that the sudden jingle of harness and sound of a horse's hoofs made them abruptly hold their converse.

The second flap was lifted ; M. Beverningh stepped forward.

The Prince entered quickly, followed by William Bentinck.

The bar of sunshine making a dazzle before his eyes, and, the other men being withdrawn into the shadows, he did not instantly perceive any one but Mr. Bromley and the Deputy for Holland.

"M. Beverningh?" he said breathlessly, "M. Beverningh, ah, what is this that they tell me, that M. de Witt——"

He stepped forward and at the same time checked his words, for he saw the little group behind the table.

A complete silence fell, and though it endured but a moment it was long enough to take effect.

William stood suddenly motionless ; he cast his large eyes over the men facing him as if he found himself in some trap.

"M. de Groot," he said at length, "you have a message for me from M. de Witt."

His manner and his voice were cold, but it was not the coldness of indifference. His entry had brought into the tent a spirit of passion and hostility ; it seemed to Florent that two parties had instantly formed—the Prince's friends and his enemies.

"These are the commissioners from the States General, Your Highness——" began Jerome Beverningh suavely.

William cut him short—

"So Count Struym told me."

The embassy came forward. To Van Odyk and de Groot his greeting was curt ; to M. Van Ghent he said : "I am sorry about your brother, Mynheer, but it was a fortunate way to die."

M. Van Ghent bowed in silence. The Prince leant against the little table and looked from him to M. de Groot.

He had never made any pretence of concealing his dislike to either of them, and it was plain that he regarded them both as his enemies, and their coming on this errand as an insult.

Peter de Groot, always courtly, began by prefacing his errand with courtesies, but William checked them.

"Will you be good enough to say at once what you have

come to say?" he said in a chilling tone. "I have a press of business."

They were all standing; the representatives of the States General facing the Prince, who had M. Bentinck behind him.

He rested one hand on the table, the other in his sword strap. He wore a black cuirass over a leather coat, and a black silk sash and scarf trimmed with gold; round his neck hung a star on a crimson ribbon; there was a great deal of Malines lace about his wrists, and in his brown beaver a long black feather fastened with a sapphire brooch.

Florent thought he looked very ill, yet, in comparison with the weighty men surrounding him, very young.

M. de Groot accepted his rebuke with courtly good temper. He was a man of wide experience, not easily embarrassed.

"M. de Witt and Their High Mightinesses consider the state of the country justifies extraordinary means of preservation."

He spoke formally, as much to M. Beverningh as to the Prince; the representative of the States was as important in his eyes as the Captain General, his mission was to both.

"M. de Witt, hearing of the passage of the Rhine by the French troops, and of the fall of the forts on the frontier, has decided to send an embassy to the King of France, to know what terms he will take. Having obtained the consent of Their High Mightinesses, myself, M. Van Ghent, and M. Odyk are appointed to convey to His Majesty the letter of the States General—we are now on our way to the castle of Keppel, where the King of France is to be found with M. de Louvois, and, following our instructions, have stopped here to acquaint you, M. Beverningh, and His Highness."

During this speech William had not taken his eyes from M. de Groot; when the speaker finished with a little bow, the Prince glanced quickly and keenly round the company.

"Was there no opposition to M. de Witt?" he asked, and Florent knew that he thought of Gaspard Fagel.

"None, Your Highness."

"The States are easily frightened," said the Prince scornfully and bitterly.

"Your Highness does not approve?" asked M. de Groot, with his easy air of elegance.

He was a handsome man, very finely dressed, with placid lips and tired eyes. He knew perfectly well that he was hateful in the eyes of William of Orange, but it did not in the least disturb his composure.

The silence of the onlookers grew tense to painfulness, so obvious and without disguise was the cold aversion of the two men facing each other.

"You are a bold man to undertake this commission," said the Prince, evading a direct answer. "It will require careful treading, M. de Groot."

"I am aware of the danger that I incur, Highness."

"Perhaps not quite," replied William in an intense, quiet tone. "This embassy, Mynheer, is utterly and entirely against my wishes."

A little stir went through the spectators. Peter de Groot was not taken aback.

"I act on the orders of M. de Witt, Highness."

"And you may please M. de Witt by your compliance with his wishes, but you will not please me." William's dark eyes held his opponent's with a bold expression of angry disdain.

"Must I remind Your Highness that you have no share in the civil government?"

William drew a deep breath.

"Had I, there would be no talk of peace, Mynheer."

Peter de Groot eyed him straightly.

"It seems as if you threaten me, Highness."

"I warn you and your companions not to go on this embassy."

M. de Groot bowed.

"I thank Your Highness, but I am bound to carry out the instructions given me by Their High Mightinesses."

"You are very rash," said William.

Peter de Groot answered proudly—

"Perhaps I am, Highness—I undertake a difficult and thankless task—but there is some hope for the Republic while she can find those who will sacrifice themselves for her."

"Do you think that you serve your country by this humiliating errand?" demanded the Prince angrily.

"I think," replied M. de Groot, with calm dignity, "that I undertake a dangerous embassy in difficult times—I think, Highness, that I carry with me the destinies of my country."

"What terms are you to offer France?" William's eyes narrowed and his lips compressed.

"I have full powers to conclude a peace——"

"On any terms?"

"On the best terms M. de Louvois will give."

"My God!" cried William, with irrepressible passion. "And what do you think Louis will ask?"

"We hope that M. de Louvois will be reasonable and His Majesty generous."

"Generous!" repeated the Prince, very pale. "Have we come to sue the generosity of the French!"

He took a step towards M. de Groot, his hand on his sword-hilt, and those who saw his face perceived that he could hate—that he could prove implacable.

"I have some authority here, at least. . . . You will leave the camp."

"Your Highness——" began M. Van Odyk.

William turned on the three of them.

"You can go," he said, "and sell your country for the highest price you can get . . . but you will not find it easy to put the purchaser in possession."

Now Peter de Groot flushed hotly.

"It is better to save a portion than to lose all," he said, "and I do not think my diplomacy can be less successful than Your Highness' arms."

The Prince cast a flashing glance on him, and the colour sprang slightly into his hollow cheeks.

"You are even bolder than I thought, M. de Groot . . . but, as you say, I have nothing to do with the civil government

... there will be a reckoning. . . . Go to the King of France and take his terms, and see the lands ploughed up and sown with salt, that no one may benefit by them even to the third generation."

He sat down in the humble chair by the little table and rested his brow in his gloved hand.

To those who watched it was painful, knowing his usual composure, to see how moved he was.

He deigned no further word to the commissioners, who left the tent accompanied by the Deputies of the State.

M. Bentinck questioned Mr. Bromley aside as to Van Mander's presence.

Florent came forward with some awe on him, he did not dare address the Prince.

"I am come with a letter from M. Fagel," he ventured to William Bentinck.

The Prince looked up at the name.

"What is that you say?" he asked.

Florent approached, gave some stumbling explanation that William did not seem to hear, and delivered the Secretary's letter.

The Prince put it down unopened.

"It seems that there is no one at the Hague can resist M. de Witt," he said; then he roused himself to speak to Matthew Bromley—

"Take M. Fagel's messenger to your quarters—it may be that I shall want to see him presently."

When the two had gone William Bentinck came softly forward; the sunlight, that was taking on a richer, deeper hue, fell through the tent opening, and lit up the golden inlay and garnishing of his armour and the bright rings of his fair hair.

The Prince took off his hat and pushed the locks back off his forehead.

"Ah, William," he said in a tone of anguish, "can it be possible?"

"These republicans are very stubborn——"

William clenched his hand on the table.

"M. de Witt!" he cried passionately. "Will he never cease to thwart me, to humiliate and insult me? . . . He must go . . . he must break if he will not bend . . . by Heaven! he must. . . . How dare he——"

His words were checked by a cough; he shook as if in bodily pain, and pressed his hand to his shining corselet over his heart.

"What I have endured—what I have taken—never worse than this—to send those two——"

"It was very insolently done," said M. Bentinck hotly.

"It was done in contempt, to show me the cipher that I am——"

He got to his feet in the restlessness of passion; his face was quite colourless, and in his eyes was an agony of bitter emotion.

"They have gone to cringe to Louis! Think of it, William—to cringe to the French while we have a man left who can grasp a gun." Again his cough took him, and he had to hold his side. "Van Odyk, too——"

"He goes to represent Your Highness, I do think."

"He goes because he is afraid of M. de Witt," flashed the Prince. "If he had loved me he had not gone."

M. Bentinck looked at his master in affectionate distress, he knew not what to do or say; his own blood beat high at the thought of suing to Louis for peace.

"Oh, heart, heart, what I have taken!" cried William through his teeth. "Ah, to be so powerless, so hedged about, so humbled—hampered always by the inadequacy of others! Had they sent me more men I had not been retreating now—but M. de Witt keeps me starved in my supplies, sets me to build with sand. We do not need these smooth lawyers to feed the arrogance of Louis with their whinings for peace, but more men to send the French back across the Rhine."

He pulled his gloves off and crushed them in his beautiful right hand.

"If I had had the garrisoning of those Rhine forts," he said,

with a gasping breath, "they had never fallen. . . . M. de Witt's paid adventurers came dear, after all his economy."

The Prince pressed his forehead with a little sound of desperation, then, as was his habit when he had been moved to speak freely, even to M. Bentinck, he fell into a deeper reserve, as if he regretted what he had said.

"Will you take some rest now?" asked M. Bentinck anxiously.

"I will write to M. Fagel—and some other people. I think to fall back on Utrecht to-morrow," returned the Prince briefly. "Amersfoort is well fortified, and should hold out."

"Will you see M. Sylvius if he arrives?"

"Yes—and any other messenger from England."

"There is to be a council meeting to-night——"

"And a review afterwards—we must hearten the men."

"You do too much, Highness."

"That is impossible ; I should do more—I wish I had your strength," he added suddenly.

This was a matter he seldom spoke of, and M. Bentinck was abashed.

"A gift I share with every common soldier," he answered.

"They are to be envied," said William, rather grimly.

He had regained his composure of manner and his control, but he looked tired and sick to swooning point. M. Bentinck could not bear to hear him cough.

"Will you see if you can get better lamps for to-night," he said. "The fumes of these choke me."

He pressed M. Bentinck's hand affectionately, took up M. Fagel's letter and, lifting the curtain, entered the inner part of the tent.

CHAPTER X

THE VICOMTE DE MONTBAS

TWO hours later William Bentinck returned to the Prince's tent.

The sun had set in a splendour of tawny vapour, and a warm yet damp wind blew over the low and melancholy looking land, and a misty heaviness was abroad.

The outer portion of the tent was empty; behind the green curtain Bentinck found the Prince alone writing at a small camp-table.

One of the oil-lamps William had complained of gave a bright but flickering light.

In the corner stood a bed with a red coverlet, and near it an iron and leather dispatch-box, the key in the lock; at the foot of the bed was a large trunk that seemed to have been ransacked for something in a hurry, for it stood open, and linen shirts and cravats were tossed up, and trailed on to the grassy floor that was a shade of unhealthy yellow in the artificial light.

The Prince's armour, that he evaded when he could (finding the weight unsupportable), lay heaped up by the trunk, and on a chair rested a violet leather case showing a number of articles in carved gold.

William nodded at Bentinck, and hastily added his name to the letter he was writing.

"It is M. Gabriel Sylvius," said M. Bentinck, "who is arrived—having pressed on, without stopping, from the Hague."

"Ah!" said the Prince quickly; then, "I expected him sooner."

"He was delayed."

"Delayed?"

The Prince frowned a little.

"On the sea, he says."

William still looked stern.

"They were fifteen hours in Calais Roads."

"Why," the Prince admitted, "that was a misfortune beyond the help of Gabriel Sylvius."

M. Bentinck seated himself.

"He was monstrous sick, is now something haggard."

"One may not wonder after fifteen hours in Calais Roads," answered the Prince, with grim sympathy; he had nearly died of his own crossing last year.

"Well," he added, "where is M. Sylvius?"

"In the camp, but——"

M. Bentinck hesitated.

"I will see him."

"Highness, on my soul you take too much fatigue upon yourself—wait until the morning."

"Nay, I will see him now," answered William; had it been any other than Bentinck he would have spoken angrily.

"It is not long before the council, if you would rest——"

"If you would fetch Sir Gabriel Sylvius, my child," said the Prince, folding up his letter.

M. Bentinck gave in, but protesting. When he returned with William's confidential agent, he found the Prince in the same place, writing again.

He stopped immediately on their entrance.

"It gives me great pleasure to see you, M. Sylvius—William, bring another chair." He looked round the tent, "We are not very luxurious here nor very neat——"

He seemed for the first time to realise the disorder about him.

"I told Bromley to see to this, but he spends too much time playing cards."

M. Sylvius went on one knee and kissed his master's hand.

"So you had a bad crossing?" William pushed back his chair and smiled.

"Hideous, Your Highness ; I thought that never should we gain the land."

The secret agent, M. Gabriel Sylvius, was a tall, lean man, with a shrewd and lined countenance, hair of a harsh reddish colour, and a freckled skin.

He looked keenly at the Prince. He had been in his father's service and greatly loved the House of Orange.

"I am sorry to see Your Highness look so ill," he said bluntly.

"No matter for that," answered William impatiently. "What of England?"

The envoy answered with a touch of satisfaction—

"I think that I can claim some amount of success."

"In what way?"

The Prince's tranquil mien could hardly disguise his eagerness.

Sir Gabriel began as concise an account of his sojourn in London as he could manage.

"Sit down," said William when he came to a pause.

M. Bentinck was also listening with rapt attention, his comely face absorbed and keen.

"I saw King Charles," continued M. Sylvius ; "he was more than friendly——"

"To me or to the States?" asked the Prince quietly.

"To Your Highness. He declared that he had largely undertaken this war on Your Highness' account, to put you in possession of your ancient rights, and that your advantages were bargained for in the treaty between himself and His Christian Majesty."

William repeated softly—

"My advantages!"

"So he termed it, Highness."

The Prince looked quickly at Bentinck, as if to discover what his friend thought of this.

"Well, go on, Mynheer."

"King Charles railed against the States and M. de Witt—he declared he had always your advancement at heart and would never forget your father's goodness to him when he was in exile at the Hague. . . . Much more, very pleasant, but without definite point."

"Did you see any beside the King?"

"Some few I managed to sound, Highness. But since the Ambassador of the States had been asked to leave, and the French were very jealous, I had to be private—all but the Court party are against the war."

"And the Parliament?"

"They would bring great pressure on the King to make peace."

"Have they not that power, with the grants?"

"The King is subsidised by France—and by many of the courtiers."

William narrowed his eyes.

"And the people?"

"Are fiercely in favour of peace—they hate the French and look on the war as a scandal."

"There seems some hope in England," said William slowly.

"Certainly," answered M. Sylvius, "it is in a state of unrest. The King hath shut up the Exchequer, thereby ruining many of the merchants, and yet vast sums are spent at Court and on that foreign woman, Louise de la Querouaille, who came over with the late Duchess d'Orleans and is no better than a spy of France. The Duke of York is unpopular, like his mother before him; and rumours are abroad that the King, to please the King of France, is a concealed Papist—which is the truth—and that the great lords are all in the pay of France."

"Which is also the truth, it seems," remarked the Prince.

"Yet the King has an easy way of agreeableness that keeps him where he is, and he is very prodigal of promises, and hath managed to smooth many an ill-seeming situation by his fair manners. I doubt his sincerity, certainly, in what he said to me—yet I hope the English may force him——"

"Into breaking with France?"

"I may hope so, Highness."

The Prince looked at him keenly.

"But at the moment—what will my uncle do now?"

"Sir, in this I have been a trifle successful. His Majesty was so far moved by your appeals that he has appointed certain envoys who will come over and look after your interests during the war. They are accredited to you, to the States, and to King Louis, and their errand is to conclude a peace satisfactory to all."

Again William glanced at Bentinck.

"And when will they arrive?" he asked.

"Highness, three crossed with me, and my lord Arlington was so ill he cursed God that he should have been born in an island."

"My lord Arlington," repeated William, moving the lamp a little farther away from him; "so he is one—who are the others?"

"My lord the Viscount Halifax, my lord Buckingham, and the young Prince James of Monmouth——"

"Why," said William, "I think all these are in the pay of France."

"My lord Halifax is now in Flanders—Bruges I think; he bears compliments to King Louis on the birth of the Duc D'Anjou; of the others two are now at the Hague—whence they will follow here, or go at once to the French camp at Doesburg."

The Prince spoke to Bentinck—

"William, what hope have we from these men?"

"Highness, I mislike their reputations."

"I think I met them all in England," said the Prince slowly. "Give me their names severally, M. Sylvius, that I may judge of their qualities."

"Firstly, the Duke of Monmouth—he is already with the King of France—commanding the English companies."

"Pass him, he can serve no serious purpose," interrupted William. "The Earl of Arlington—I do mistrust him now;

it is believed he drew up the treaty of Dover and was well paid for it, is it not?"

"I am sure of it, Highness . . . he leans avowedly to the French; then there is my lord the Viscount——"

"I do remember him," answered William thoughtfully. "I should think he is honest—for an Englishman, though slow and lazy and unstable."

"Finally his Grace of Buckingham, Highness, who stands high in favour with the King."

The Prince was silent at the name, and his eyes hardened.

He had ugly memories of Buckingham.

The Court of Charles, that had flashed its brightest for his bewilderment, had filled him only with disgust and aversion. The King, at first inclined to confide the treaty of Dover to William, had found him impervious to flattery, and informed Louis that his nephew was "too Dutch and too Protestant for anything to be hoped for from him."

But Buckingham, repelled in the advances he deemed irresistible, fell back on his wit, and with the readiness of a shallow nature ridiculed what he could not understand.

The Prince led a strict life and showed reserved manners—here were the subjects of numerous pasquinades on his Grace's part; William's regular church-goings and firm adherence to the theology of Geneva furnished matter for many profane jests that were not long in coming to the young man's ears. And once his Grace, edged on by the King, and backed by many of the ribald lords, had tried to humiliate the austere youth of nineteen by intoxicating him with strong waters disguised as a cordial for his cough.

The Prince had discovered the trick soon enough to baulk them of their amusement, but not before the mixture had made him miserably ill.

Coldness had blunted the point of the jest, and for once made Buckingham feel foolish; but the Prince, under his passive exterior, was bitterly outraged on his most sensitive points—his religion and his ill-health.

Therefore he was silent at the name of Buckingham, and a faint colour tinged his pallor.

"The envoys bring with them Henry St. Jermyn and Sir Edward Seymour," continued Sir Gabriel Sylvius.

"I did not know M. St. Jermyn was a politician," said William sarcastically.

"Sir, he, like my lord Buckingham, has found a new amusement—that is all."

The Prince made a little movement as if he roused himself.

"I think my uncle has sent me a pretty parcel of knaves," he remarked calmly. "But it would be difficult to discover an honest man at Whitehall."

"Their instructions may be better than their characters," suggested M. Bentinck.

"We will hope so."

William reflected a moment, then addressed his secret agent—

"I think, M. Sylvius, it would be well if you join these English again, and accompany them to the King of France."

He would not mention the name of the enemy's camp, for Doesburg, where the King lay, was one of his own lordships, and it was exceedingly bitter to him that the French had taken it.

He coughed, impatiently turned down the lamp, that with the slightest movement smoked, and added—

"You can at least report directly and truthfully to me on what takes place; these commissioners will colour matters to suit themselves. And for your further convenience you had better take some Dutch secretary——"

He paused, then continued slowly—

"There is one Van Mander in Bromley's quarters, newly come from the Hague, who will do very well."

Sir Gabriel Sylvius rose.

"I am greatly obliged to you," said William, "for I think you have acquitted yourself creditably."

Sir Gabriel kissed his hand.

"Mr. Bromley has some monies of mine, and he will give

you what you need," added the Prince evenly. "And I will now tell you, myself, what you will hear presently bruited abroad, that M. de Witt hath despatched an embassy for peace to the King of France—which is something I cannot talk of."

"Surely, Highness," answered Sir Gabriel, "that will fall in with this deputation from England."

"I would have the alliance of England, not peace with France," said the Prince sternly.

Sylvius glanced at William Bentinck, and was about to withdraw.

"The officer without will take you to Bromley's tent—Florent Van Mander is the name of the young man I mentioned—you shall shortly hear from me."

Sir Gabriel bowed himself in silence out of the now dimly-lit tent.

The Prince sat with his elbow on the table and his cheek in his hand.

"This is hopeful news, surely," said M. Bentinck cheerfully.

William smiled at him affectionately and tolerantly—

"Possibly—just possibly I might detach England from France . . ."

M. Bentinck laughed.

"You are become a statesman as well as a soldier, Sir, and meditate great designs."

"Do you imagine that these English come with serious purpose to listen to reasonable terms?" asked the Prince quickly.

"I imagine King Charles will contrive your advantage——"

"Mine!—what of the States?"

"The States!" M. Bentinck shrugged his shoulders. "The States are your enemies, Sir!"

"M. de Witt is my enemy," answered William; "which is, perhaps, another matter."

He took the twisted, silver taper-holder, melted the wax at the lamp and sealed his letter.

"I must get this to M. Fagel—at once—or he will fall again under M. de Witt's thumb."

M. Bentinck rose.

"Meanwhile you had best have some dinner, Sir ; it will have been ready some time and the others waiting——"

The Prince took up the lamp and followed his friend without demur into the other half of the tent.

He went to the entrance and called to the officer on duty.

"You will find some messenger to convey this at once to the Hague."

"Yes, Highness."

William gave him the letter for M. Fagel, and was turning away when the soldier spoke—

"Highness, M. de Montbas has returned."

"M. de Montbas !" The Prince was alert again instantly.

"With his company cut to pieces, Highness."

"I will see him," said William.

M. Bentinck protested.

"After dinner, Sir——"

"This cannot wait."

"What can M. de Montbas have to say that is of importance?"

"It is not he, it is I who have something to say," returned the Prince. "Send to him," he added to the officer. "I wish to see him at once."

M. Bentinck seated himself with an air of resignation.

"Get to your dinner," smiled the Prince, "I will come immediately."

"Nay, Sir, not without you."

Now William spoke with authority—

"Bentinck, I will see this man alone . . . in a while I will join you."

Grimacing a little, and with a clatter of his armour, M. Bentinck left the tent.

The Prince turned up the lamp, set it carefully on the table, and walked up and down, keeping his gaze upon the ground.

When the flap was lifted and a man entered, hesitating, William stopped where he was by the table and raised his eyes.

M. de Montbas was magnificently dressed. Over his blue

and silver coat he wore, falling off one shoulder and fastened across his breast with a gilt chain, a green velvet cloak.

There were jewels in his cravat and holding the blue feather in his beaver. He wore a very handsome sword, and kept his light-gloved hand on it.

He was a fine man, if somewhat haggard ; but now a white look on his face, and his black eyes startled, joined to his air of hesitation, took from him his dignity.

He uncovered and bowed.

William made no answering salute, but stood rigid, looking slight and sombre in his dark attire.

"Have you anything to say?" he asked.

M. de Montbas straightened himself—

"I have my report to make, Your Highness," he said in a strained voice ; "but Your Highness wished to see me——"

"How many men have you with you?"

M. de Montbas bit his lower lip—

"I have lost fifteen hundred, Sir."

"That is half your force."

"We were pursued by a detachment of cavalry under M. de Rochfort."

"And——?"

"The rearguard—and the baggage were cut off——"

The unfortunate general spoke awkwardly ; it seemed, by his demeanour, more as if he stood before a tribunal of judges than speaking alone to a youth over twenty years his junior, and whom he had patronised as a child.

"You did not offer fight?" demanded the Prince.

"Your Highness, we were hopelessly outnumbered by the enemy . . . some of the guns sank in a polder——"

The Prince cut short these excuses."

"M. de Montbas," he said in a tone of exquisite anger, "I perceive you are a very bad soldier."

The Vicomte took a step to one side in a baited way.

"What does Your Highness mean?" he asked in an agitated fashion.

William did not take his eyes off him.

"Your sister's husband, M. de Groot, hath gone on an embassy to make terms with the King of France, and I think you have a mind to follow his example—you also wish to stand well with Louis, do you not?"

A dark colour tinged the Frenchman's pallid face.

"Your Highness cannot mean what it would seem you intend."

For the first time William moved; he came a step nearer the other.

"I mean that you very basely abandoned the post I gave you on the Rhine," he spoke evenly, but with a bitter dislike, "thereby allowing easy passage to the French, which was an irreparable disaster and a thing that could have been prevented."

M. de Montbas took his hand from his sword and pressed it to the breast of his shining cuirass.

"Your Highness is unjust . . . what could I do with three thousand men?"

"If ye had had but three hundred, M. de Montbas," answered William fiercely, "ye could have done your duty; and if ye had had but three ye could have done it . . . and died."

The Vicomte fumbled at the chain on his chest.

"I had no orders——"

"You had my orders to defend your position."

M. de Montbas broke out desperately—

"Before God I was misled! I asked for orders and none came. I wrote to the Deputies, they said this and that——"

"I never said but the one thing."

M. de Montbas answered wretchedly—

"Your Highness must be merciful . . . I had no one to consult . . . and after the fall of Wesel——"

"M. le Vicomte," interrupted the Prince sternly, "the captains who delivered Wesel to the French have been dismissed the Army and their swords broken over their heads."

"Your Highness—I did what I could."

M. de Montbas protested vehemently but impotently.

"I did what I could——"

"Oh, we waste the time," said William. He went towards the entrance.

"What will Your Highness do?" cried the Vicomte desperately, swinging round to face him.

The Prince turned also, so that they stood but a foot or so apart.

"What I did with the garrison of Wesel."

"Your Highness!"

"Do you think I am a child to accept your excuses?" asked William scornfully.

"This is because I am the friend of M. de Witt."

"No, Monsieur, it is because you are a traitor——"

"Prince!" exclaimed M. de Montbas in anguish.

"—or a coward," added William, unmoved. "One is as dangerous as the other, but I would rather think you in the pay of France, for it is unthinkable that you are the other."

The Frenchman fell into a shivering agitation.

"Before Heaven I am innocent! I have served the States faithfully——"

"In times of peace—Monsieur."

"You insult me——"

"I will court-martial you—give me your sword."

M. de Montbas clapped his hand to his weapon.

"You have not the right, Sir—the States are my masters."

"I am the head of the Army, with at least enough power to punish soldiers who disgrace my flag."

"I shall appeal to M. de Witt!"

"Very well. . . . M. de Witt hath himself to look after—his credit will not be improved by your action, Monsieur."

This hint that the Grand Pensionary had not the power to protect him completely unnerved M. de Montbas. He had feared the Prince as much as he had always disliked him, and the sense of William's hatred had of late weighed heavily with him.

It had not occurred to him that William, as the Captain General, would dare go as far as this, or he would never

have returned to the Dutch headquarters. Like the culmination of all that he had ever dreaded was this sudden disgrace. He found himself in the power of an implacable enemy, and the loss of his honour, his property, and his life seemed already accomplished, for his hope in M. de Witt suddenly fell away.

He stood quite still, with a tortured expression and his hand clutched on his breast.

William gave him an utterly contemptuous glance and was about to lift the tent flap.

M. de Montbas flung out his hand—

"I entreat—Your Highness—this is ruin—disgrace—death!"

His voice was hoarse, and the blood had flushed up into his eyes.

In the ill light of the lamp and its confusing shadows the Prince's face was not clearly to be seen.

But M. de Montbas had little hope that he was moved.

"Sir," he urged desperately, "consider what you are about before you ruin me."

Receiving no answer to this but a cold look of scorn, he broke out again—

"You always hated me—from the first you meant to undo me."

"M. de Montbas," replied William, "I opposed your appointment—I opposed the giving to you of that post upon the Rhine, had you been wise you would have taken neither the one nor the other——"

"You mean to drive me to despair," interjected the Vicomte.

"I mean to maintain discipline in my army," said the Prince, and put his hand on the tent flap.

M. de Montbas' body heaved, and his gay appointments, gold cords and jewels, glimmered in the dusky light.

"Before God I am innocent!" he declared passionately. "I am of the Reformed Faith—what have I to do with France?"

The Prince regarded him keenly.

"I am no traitor," he repeated vehemently. "I swear it!"

"If that be not perjury I am sorry for you," answered William; "for Louis is your King, and it were better for you to serve him through treachery than fail us through cowardice."

The Vicomte made an effort to control himself.

"I am unfortunate," he said in a half sobbing bitterness "to have ever displeased Your Highness, for I see you are unmerciful."

William lifted the flap, blew a little whistle he drew from his pocket, and said something rapidly to the soldier the summons brought.

"I shall appeal to the Grand Pensionary!" cried M. de Montbas.

"If you be innocent you may prove it without his help," answered William, turning back into the tent; "and if you be guilty John de Witt will not dare to save you."

He stopped at the table and looked narrowly at the other man.

"It is true I never liked you," he said, "but if you had been one whom I loved, and had let the French across the Rhine and lost fifteen hundred men, I should now act the same."

M. de Montbas winced, and put his gloved hand to his lips with a gesture of terror.

"Your Highness," he said huskily, "spare me this and I will resign."

"I will spare you nothing—give me your sword."

The wretched officer made a convulsive movement and dragged his pistol from his belt, as if to turn it on the Prince or on himself.

"Put that down," said William scornfully, and as he spoke a detachment of men entered the tent.

M. de Montbas flung down his pistol and stepped back.

The Prince spoke to the captain who had entered; he was a young Frieslander of the musketeers.

"Arrest M. de Montbas and keep him under strict guard. Monsieur," he addressed the Vicomte, "will you give your sword to me or to this gentleman?"

The Frenchman drew his weapon and presented it to the Prince.

"The States will see justice done," he said in a shaking voice.

"Monsieur, *I* will see justice done," answered William.

He put the sword across the chair beside him and turned his back.

"By your leave, Mynheer," said the young Frieslander.

M. de Montbas submitted in silence. The soldiers saluted the Prince and withdrew, their prisoner in their midst. William looked over his shoulder at them, and, when they had gone, leant against the table in an exhausted fashion gazing at the ground.

He had not stood so above a minute when William Bentinck entered hotly, with a colour in his face.

The Prince gave him a rather languid glance.

"Highness, it is the French; a boor has come running up to say they are advancing to surprise us——"

"I thought so," replied William. "It is M. de Rochfort on the heels of M. de Montbas."

CHAPTER XI

IN TIME OF WAR

THE now hastily summoned Council of War was distracted with private fears and disagreements. The Deputies, whose opinion had to be consulted, and with whom rested the power of final decision, were powerfully affected by the embassy M. de Witt had just sent upon its way to Doesburg.

It showed, they thought, both that the Grand Pensionary despaired of saving the country by force of arms, and also that he considered an advantageous treaty might yet be made with Louis.

They were, therefore, for avoiding a decisive engagement, and suggested that the army should retreat.

The deputy for Zeeland and M. Beverningh, influenced by the Prince, opposed this, and a high argument followed.

M. de Zuylestein and most of the officers of the Prince's Staff were for fortifying the present camp and awaiting the attack of the enemy.

William himself was for falling back on Utrecht, at present undefended, and securing that against the advance of the French.

Under the orders of the States, and much against the wish of the Captain General, the forces had been imprudently divided. Major-General Wurtz had two thousand seven hundred men with which to defend Gorcum in the south; Prince John Maurice, with ten thousand men at Muyden, covered Amsterdam; the Marquis de Louvignies with the Spanish cavalry to the number of fifteen hundred occupied

Schoonhoven ; and Count Hornes with the same number was stationed at Gouda.

These four positions were skilfully chosen, but inclusive of the men sent to strengthen the garrisons of Nymwegen and Arnheim they left the Prince, who had ardently wished to defend the Yssel to the last, a force of only three thousand six hundred under his personal control. With these he could hope to do nothing save defend as he might the entrance to Holland.

He told the Deputies so, and they, with the indecision that had so hampered his movements, shrugged and argued and would not say what they would or would not do.

At length the Prince, who had been largely silent, threatened to throw up his commission if he was not allowed a free hand. His position, he declared, was intolerable, and he would be no man's puppet. M. de Witt's policy of controlling the theatre of war from a Cabinet in the Binnenhof had been disastrous enough already. He, the Captain General, was constantly overruled and disregarded ; they tied his hands, then tried to make him responsible for actions he had never sanctioned.

He was supported by M. de Zuyvestein and M. Beverningh, and finally the others dare stand out no more. Two hours after the news of the approach of the enemy had been received orders were given to strike camp and fall back on Utrecht.

The news of the advance of M. de Rochfort was at best vague. Scouts reported that a large force had taken Emerloo and Rutten, and was approaching from that direction. The flying peasants declared the country from Heerde to Vaasen had been devastated, and that William's lordship of "het Loo" was in the hands of the victorious French.

The Prince, seeing that only the insufficiently defended fortress of Nijkerk was between the enemy and Amersfoort and Utrecht, made a *détour* and threw his men along the banks of the Eem before Amersfoort, to whose defences he had just seen.

But the army were no sooner in position than the survivors of the little town of Wijk, a fortress on the Rhine, arrived

with the news that a large division of the French were advancing on Utrecht by that route.

An instant message was sent to de Louvignies at Schoonhoven to defend the passage of the river Leek, and a small body of cavalry was sent on to Utrecht to encourage the city with an assurance of the Prince's speedy arrival and to urge them to see to their defences.

It was now about one in the morning, and further arrivals from Elst, Schalkwyk, and Houten confirmed the news of the near vicinity of the enemy.

It was said that Louis had made a public boast that he would take Utrecht and treat with the commissioners of the States in their own town.

M. de Rochfort, with a large detachment of cavalry, was acting as his advance guard in clearing the country from Doesburg to Amersfoort.

The Captain General's entire efforts now became directed to saving Utrecht. The city was one of the largest and finest in the Netherlands; it directly protected the entrance to Holland, and if it fell there was every reason to suppose that its loss would prove as fatal to that province as the capture of Wesel had to Guelders and Overijssel, both of which were now almost entirely in the hands of the enemy.

By a rapid countermarch, which was much impeded by a moonless, misty night, the army of the States recrossed the Eem at Amersfoort (which town was encouraged in its intention to resist the enemy by the addition of a company of infantry to its scanty garrison), and found themselves at daybreak in the rich and wooded meadows between Soest and Zeyst, the heart of the fertile and prosperous lands that comprised the district of Rutten.

They were perilously placed between two rivers, one of which, the Eem, had only Amersfoort to defend it; the other, the Rhine, being utterly unprotected until reinforcements should arrive from Gouda or Schoonhoven.

And as the French were circling round from the direction

of Nijkerk, and on the other side from the banks of the Rhine, they indeed seemed, with their hopelessly inferior numbers, to be in a peril from which they could do nothing to extricate themselves.

Several of the Deputies were reduced to despair, and were for putting pressure on the Prince to abandon Utrecht and retreat into Holland towards Amsterdam.

But William, who owed his present position to their cautious policy, refused to listen to them, and, energetically encouraging his officers, pressed on towards the town of Utrecht.

They had not, however, come in sight of the walls before they heard the guns of the enemy and saw pale fires in the early sky, and at half-past six of a misty, warm morning they saw through their perspective glasses the glittering lines of the cavalry of France completely blocking their progress.

By reason of the flat country they could see a great way, and Count Struym, who knew the district well, pointed out the burning fortress of Zeyst, which had either blown up or been fired by the French.

The army halted, and officers and Deputies held a hasty consultation on horseback. The enemy now lay between them and Utrecht, and it was impossible to gain that town without a battle.

The Deputies again advised a retreat towards Amsterdam. In face of the overwhelming number of the enemy, M. de Rochfort's force advancing from Nijkerk to conjoin, the unfortifiable nature of the ground, it would be not a battle but a massacre, and they were not authorised by the States to sacrifice the last defenders of the country; a defeat, they argued, would have a very ill effect on the projected negotiations of M. de Groot.

On the other hand, Count Struym contended that a retreat in face of the enemy would result only in a pursuit and an utter rout, in which they all would equally perish, but in this way with ignominy and disgrace.

The young Captain General sat silent on his grey horse and looked at the distant line of the French.

He was so well used to argument and opposition that he withheld his opinion till asked.

He had a great contempt for words, and the eloquence of the Deputies seemed to him mere mouthing. He was thinking of Utrecht, and wondering what there was to be got out of his men.

He had only been head of the army a few weeks, but he had made a new thing of the forces under his command. Throughout a campaign that had been a series of disasters and retreats his men had never lost heart. He had a way of maintaining discipline, and a personal popularity that the veterans did not possess; a gift of command that was worth everything to an army pitted against tremendous odds.

He turned his eyes on his men as they defiled across the meadows, to where the vanguard halted by a belt of trees and an old farm and windmill, and thoughtfully stroked his horse's neck.

William Bentinck rode up to him.

"Sir," he cried impatiently, "if these lawyers have their way we shall be cut to pieces as we stand——"

"They are for a retreat?" said the Prince.

"Yes——"

"It is neither wise nor honourable to retreat in sight of the enemy," remarked the Captain General coldly. He turned his horse and rode up to M. Beverningh, and touched him on the arm.

"Mynheer," he said curtly and decidedly, "there has been enough talking."

They all looked at him.

"What is your wish?" asked Count Struym eagerly. "It seems to me, Highness, we have no course open but to fight."

"There is Utrecht," answered the Prince. "I mean to save Utrecht."

The Deputies were silent. They wished, above all things, to avoid responsibility. William eyed them; he saw perfectly well that they would neither sanction nor veto his plans, and that

whatever course he took they would blame him if it proved disastrous, and take the credit if it ended in success. Divided authority placed both sides in a difficult position, but if the Deputies hesitated the Captain General's decision was prompt and unshakable.

His scheme was to remain and face the French with three regiments of cavalry, thereby distracting them from Utrecht, which town Count Struym, with the rest of the army of the States, was to reach in a *détour* by way of Maartensdyk and Maarsen.

It was hoped that before midday reinforcements would arrive from Schoonhoven and Gouda; these, attacking the rear of the enemy, would enable the Prince to withdraw the rest of his army along the road to Utrecht, which Count Struym must keep open, and throw himself into that town before the French bombarded the fortifications.

If these tactics savoured of desperation, the situation was such as called for desperate expedients, and no one dared withstand them. Some encouragement was afforded by the fact that the rising ground would disguise from the enemy that the stand the Dutch offered covered the retreat of the greater portion of their forces, and it was reasonably hoped that the French would not suspect that any attempt was being made to save Utrecht.

At half-past seven Count Struym drew off with the bulk of the army and the larger number of the Deputies.

M. Beverningh, however, remained with the Prince, who, relieved from supervision and control, was energetically disposing his little force to the best advantage.

Since they had broken camp they had been swelled by the survivors of the garrisons of the Rhine fortresses, large numbers of peasants, and M. de Montbas' company of cavalry, which had been put under the command of M. Bentinck. In all they numbered about two thousand men, of which fourteen hundred were cavalry.

They had been marching and counter-marching all night, and some were mere fugitives without as much as a musket. They

were weary, and had every excuse for discouragement; since neither the number of the enemy nor the peace proposals of M. de Witt (which all took for an indication of despair on that statesman's part) could be disguised from them. To add to their discomfort the baggage waggons had not been able to keep pace with the rapid movements of the army, and there was not so much as a loaf of bread among them.

The mill and adjacent farms were found to be deserted, all the surrounding country-folk having retreated into Utrecht, and the hopes of food from these were dispelled.

The men were mostly unmoved. Their officers and the Prince himself were as badly off as themselves; they would sooner fight than retreat; they had a way of doing both quietly.

William rode among the companies, and his quick observation detected no discontent. Many of the men sang psalms as they brought up the guns, and there were weighty arguments on points of doctrine between Arminians and Calvinists, Latter Day Saints and Knipperdollings,—for these people, the most obstinate and unconvincible in the world, found one of their keenest pleasures in logic and argument.

William's appearance woke their deep and sincere enthusiasm.

He spoke to them with more animation than M. Bentinck had ever known him show, promised the cavalry (who were doing the work of foot soldiers) double pay, and the peasants, who were digging trenches and erecting palisades, a florin a day while they stuck to their work.

He heartened them with a promise of rest and food in Utrecht before night, and entreated them to stand firm in defence of their religion and their liberty.

His resolution and his energy did not fail of its effect. They forgot fatigue, the number and prestige of the enemy, their own former disasters, and set themselves cheerfully in readiness.

But if the men were encouraged by the Prince's inspection, he himself was not. Everything was lacking—ammunition, guns, even shoes and coats.

A considerable number of the cavalry were on foot for want of horses, and two culverins had had to be abandoned for lack of gun-carriages.

William thought bitterly of M. de Witt. The Grand Pensionary had answered his appeal in eager and affectionate terms, but neither levies nor supplies had arrived; de Witt seemed more desirous to send M. de Groot on a mission of peace than to strengthen the army, and the new Captain General was left with miserably inadequate means.

"M. Beverningh," said William, "this is my first experience of war, and I do not think any one ever fell into a harder apprenticeship."

And the coming encounter was his first experience of actual battle. He had been a fortnight with the army but had heard no more than the distant sound of the French guns; he had witnessed no engagement.

Yet perhaps M. Beverningh was the only man to whom it occurred as an anomaly that a youth of twenty-one who only knew war from books, and had never seen bloodshed, should be commanding an army in such desperate straits against a foe led by the most famous soldiers in the world.

Every one else seemed as unconscious as was the Prince himself. If he lacked experience he had certainly rare qualities; but M. Beverningh was curious as to his behaviour in the actual shock of battle, in the actual moment of leading his men to the encounter.

The infantry was placed behind the hastily constructed earthworks, and in the mill and farm buildings which were taken as the nucleus of the defence.

The French were an unaccountable time in advancing; seemed, if anything, to be hanging back.

The truth was their commander had no wish for an encounter with the Prince of Orange, against whom his master had no quarrel and whose interests Louis had agreed to respect. His intention was to take Utrecht, and he thought that, given a little time, William would have the tact to withdraw and leave

the road open to him as M. de Montbas had done at the Rhine.

But about ten o'clock, perceiving (as he thought) the entire Dutch forces still immovable before their protection of trees and rising ground, he advanced to the attack, after expressing to his officers his regret that His Majesty's cousin had given them the unnecessary trouble of beating him.

He had under his command seven or eight thousand men, well fed, well drilled; a fine corps of artillery, and two of the most renowned cavalry regiments of France. He was further strengthened by the knowledge of M. de Rochfort's advance from Nijkerk and near approach of the King himself, who was reported to have already left Doesburg with the Household brigade, a conquered country behind his banners.

Through the thick, sweet, hazy air came at last the sound of the French drums and trumpets, and as it was quite windless their colours and banners were all displayed above them as they marched.

They had left their baggage waggons and some of their artillery under the guard of the infantry in the rear, for they did not regard the coming engagement as one likely long to impede their progress, and at an easy pace their magnificent cavalry advanced across the flat meadows to the little wood of elm and beech where the birds were singing among the warm leaves and the Dutch waited.

The sun bathed them in an even glow; red and blue coats, gold and silver trappings gleamed as the men and horses moved. From the distance even they had an extraordinarily easy demeanour, as if they laughed amongst themselves.

Soon it became possible to distinguish the soft tramp of the horses, the jingle of the harness, and the rumbling of the guns shaking on their carriages.

The Dutch trumpets made answer now, and as the French came within range their guns opened fire, tearing the summer peace into fury.

And as the smoke curled away the cavalry of the States

galloped out of the wood in little companies, colours flying and slack reins.

The Prince of Orange, Count Königsmarck, and William of Aylva were together on a little incline, watching the enemy.

"Who are they?" asked the Prince of the German, who had travelled much in France.

"Regiments of the line, Highness, dragoons,—and in the centre one of the Household brigades." He raised his perspective glass. "Yes, the company under the Prince de Soubise. I can see the colours."

William said nothing, he turned and galloped to the centre of the line of guns, just beneath the mill.

The French, assuming the Netherlanders would have remained under cover if their numbers were weak, took the daring charge of the cavalry as a sign that their entire force was concealed by the rising ground.

This was the impression the Prince had hoped to create.

Instantly the French, wishing to draw their enemy into the open and to put themselves beyond the range of the guns, retreated with a skilful backward movement, steady and swift as the reflux of a wave.

Then the foremost company of cavalry, regardless of the empty saddles already made, divided, wheeled to left and right, met again and charged. This was the French mode; reckless, showy, expensive, but irresistible, at once the glory and the ruin of their arms. It exposed the very flower of their youth, gallantry, and nobility to the whole brunt of the battle, while the infantry remained comparatively immune.

Again and again the French were to buy dashing and profitless victories at the price of their best blood; again and again the aristocrats and gentlemen were to be sacrificed in cruel slaughter, until all the finest lives in France were hurled away in pursuance of the reckless policy of the cavalry charge of the Household troops.

So now they came on, reins hanging loose, the horses with lengthened necks, flattened ears, and staring eyes; ribbons,

feathers, laces, and curls blowing back over the shoulders of the men.

The Dutch formed close and received the shock of the onset without flinching.

There was a short struggle, then the French withdrew at the gallop, wheeled and charged.

The Dutch backed before them, and as they swept to the foot of the wood a volley from the guns their cavalry had galloped aside to make way for sent back half the horses riderless.

The French were too well trained to show confusion ; this was a fiercer defence, however, than they had expected.

M. de Soubise hurled forward two more companies and himself advanced with his own light horse.

This fresh and hot onslaught almost overpowered the Dutch horse ; they were driven back almost to the mouths of their own guns.

The Prince sent out the Spanish cavalry to the rescue, and placed a regiment of foot behind the gunners where they could pick off the French cavalry from the cover of the trees.

M. de Soubise, unable to make much use of his artillery, had thrown out his left wing, composed of brigadiers and guns, in a half circle to attempt to storm the wood where the ground was flat and a small cottage the only vantage spot.

William, perceiving this, sent M. Bentinck to the assistance of the officer occupying the cottage, and himself rode up to M. D'Aylva, who was commanding the troops held in reserve.

"The French are magnificent," he said, "but our men fight very well."

He was flushed and excited, his eyes dark and wide open.

All the restraint had gone from his voice, and there was a new eagerness in his expression ; the older man, at this irrelevant moment, found himself remembering that his General was a boy who had never seen battle before.

Himself a famous soldier, who had been named "a second Mars," he looked critically at the Prince.

"M. de Soubise has every advantage," he said.

"But we can keep him at bay till nightfall," replied William, "when we can gain Utrecht."

"Do you think so, Highness?"

The Prince turned on him the candid look of youth.

"Yes," he said simply.

The air about them hung dun and heavy with smoke between the trees. The whizz and thud of bullets striking the trunks, the hoarse, deafening boom of the cannon, the nearer sound of striking tinder, transformed the sweet stillness of the morning into the lurid tumult of war.

"Your Highness is in some danger here," said M. D'Aylva. "If you would withdraw nearer the mill——"

William smiled, and rode out of the trees on to the little clearing beside the guns.

The battle beat fiercely to and fro in the green meadows. M. de Soubise had turned his attention to the position held by M. Bentinck's untaught valour, and at the foot of the wood the Dutch and French struggled desperately together.

The Prince's keen glance swept over the field.

A cannon-ball fell beside him and exploded, frightening his horse into rearing frantically. He kept his seat and quieted the animal, wiping the foam from its face with his lace handkerchief.

Just beneath him a Dutch company had been repulsed by the enemy; nearly all the officers had fallen, and the men, left leaderless, were retreating in a confusion.

The Prince galloped down the incline, and to the head of the disheartened company. They were men of his own province, part of a Holland regiment.

"Gentlemen," he said, drawing his sword, "will you have me for your leader?"

He was still smiling.

"It is the Prince!" they cried.

He lifted his sword and led them straight against the French dragoons.

They fought now with a mad passion that was not to be withstood . . .

The French gave way, inch by inch, and eventually retreated to the main body.

Without a moment's pause the Prince, shouting to the Spanish cavalry to join him, dashed round to the aid of M. Bentinck, who was being overpowered by sheer numbers.

Time after time his little band was driven back, time after time he led them again to the charge. The French themselves were amazed at this undaunted persistence; more than once their ranks were broken, and when Count Königsmarck came with a Guelderland regiment to the support of his master they abandoned their attack on the cottage after a fight lasting two hours.

The sun was now high overhead, and the strong rays drove even through the choking smoke and glared on the armour of the combatants; the air was hot, dry, and close with the smell of blood and powder. The leaves, but a few hours ago so fresh, hung withered and burnt along the lower branches, and some of the neat painted out-buildings of the farm were burning steadily with pale flames and black smoke.

Rank after rank, line after line, the French cavalry rode up, and the right wing of the Dutch began to give way.

The Prince extricated himself from the confusion round the rescued outpost, and rode with M. Bentinck to his retreating men.

They had lost all their officers save one young ensign, a Friesland giant with bright gold hair, who seemed dazed, not knowing what to do. He fought like one in a dream, aimlessly, the red blood drying on his cuirass.

William dismounted, throwing his reins to M. Bentinck.

"That is not the way!" he cried. "You must put more fire in it, gentlemen."

He placed himself at their head and led them against the musketeers.

The young officer stared at him, bewildered.

"Mynheer!" cried the Prince, "second me now and I will give you this company!"

The Frieslander roused himself and shouted a word of command.

The Dutch stood firm, then hurled themselves against the enemy.

Twice they were repulsed by the superior force, twice the Prince led them back; till the trampled grass grew so choked with dead that the living were divided by the slain.

William of Aylva surveyed the battle from the top of the incline.

"Does the Prince want to meet his death?" he muttered; then, "What is this but madness?" And he looked at the army of France that rolled almost as far as the horizon, and, though he was a brave man, his counsels were for a flight, saving such lives as they could.

He saw the Prince, remounted on the grey horse, emerge from the smoky tumult, and he rode down to meet him.

"Highness,"—he caught the young man's bridle,—"this is madness——"

William answered—

"No, it is my duty—where are these men if I do not hearten them?"

"If you are slain where are our hopes?"

The Prince laughed.

"I shall not be slain to-day."

As he spoke a bullet glanced along his cuirass, carrying away the knot of his black scarf.

"We cannot do it," said M. D'Aylva. "Will not Your Highness order a retreat?"

"Not yet, not yet!" answered the Prince passionately. He looked round at the broken battalions only his unconquerable energy had kept together so long.

"They need encouragement," he exclaimed. "They dare not stand up to such veteran troops—yet it could be done——"

"If every man had your spirit," muttered William D'Aylva, again looking at him curiously, "I believe it could."

The Prince gathered together the last of the cavalry and rode back into the hottest part of the battle.

William D'Aylva, though with no hope, led the reserve regiment of Guelderlanders into action. Nearly all the Dutch

artillery was useless ; some of the guns were spiked, others had lost their gunners, and there was little powder left.

The right wing of the Holland regiments was utterly cut to pieces ; M. Bentinck, coming too late to the rescue, could bring off no more than the colours and one tattered detachment. Still the centre and the left fought on. The Captain General found himself separated from his men ; he galloped to the Spanish cavalry, where he had stationed it to defend the entrance to the wood.

Close to the rescued cottage he met a band of men who were doing nothing.

He drew up his horse and turned in the saddle.

"Why do you not charge?" he asked in French, thinking they were the Spanish who used that language.

The leader answered civilly that they had no powder, and even as he spoke William saw that they were French.

He was entirely in their power. His pride did not permit him to fly ; he backed his horse.

"Good," he said ; "I will send you some powder."

Utterly unconscious, they let him go, taking him for a French officer.

Not in the least impressed by what his temerity had exposed him to, William gazed round fiercely for the Spanish, who had apparently forsaken their post.

Suddenly he saw a detachment of them riding through the underwood—but riding away from the battle.

Pale with rage, he spurred up to them.

"What is this?" he asked them. "I think you should have your faces to the enemy!"

They had a look about them such as is seldom seen in men ; sometimes in a horse before it shies.

"It is a massacre out there . . . carnage," answered one through his teeth. "The day is lost . . . lost."

"I'll shoot the man who says so!" exclaimed the Prince, putting his hand to his holster. "Get back to your places, you cowards, and never care whether the day be lost or no as long as you stay where you are bidden."

They cowered before him, and he, in his wrath, turned the officer's horse himself, and when the man still hesitated he took his whip from his boot and lashed them back into the battle . . .

It was now nearly dusk, and as the sun struck level rays across the battlefield, before it sunk below the flat horizon, the sound of the Marquis de Rochfort's guns was heard in the distance.

No human endeavour could do any more. The Prince had kept up a fight of eight hours against overwhelming odds, holding at bay, with his raw, tired troops, the splendid forces of France.

More than half his army was slain; his guns were dismounted, his powder spent. Reluctantly he drew off his exhausted men, first firing the mill and the farmhouses to impede the enemy in the pursuit, which they were, however, by no means inclined to make.

M. de Soubise was quite satisfied with his victory, and it was no part of the training of his school of warfare to follow up a success.

He still imagined the Dutch to have been at least twice their number, and consequently magnified his own glory.

His men were tired, and with the dark great clouds blew up and warm rain fell. The French camp was pitched on the field of battle, and glowing dispatches written to His Majesty and M. de Louvois.

The Prince and his officers on the Utrecht road were not ill content either, for they had done what they intended, and at no higher a price than they had been prepared to pay.

Utrecht was saved; M. de Zuylestein installed within its walls.

Riding through the soft raining dark, William repeated that to himself—

"Utrecht is saved."

But when they were within a few miles of the city a little band of men, bearing lanterns, came to meet them.

M. de Zuylestein's men, with this news—

“The Catholics and French in Utrecht have seized the town and closed the gates to the forces of the United Provinces. They intend to open to King Louis, and refuse even to provision Your Highness' men.”

CHAPTER XII

AFTER THE DEFEAT

IN a little farm, abandoned by its owner, the Prince and his Staff found shelter.

There was nothing to be done until dawn at least—since Utrecht had closed her gates.

The bitterness of this disappointment was well-nigh unbearable ; the long day's struggle had had solely this end in view—to save Utrecht.

The men were worn out, hungry, wet, disheartened ; only the firmest discipline prevented a mutiny or a panic.

Two of the baggage waggons had come up with them ; in one there was nothing but Jerome Beverningh's camp furniture. Anger and derision were roused, the Deputy had brought with him such things as velvet chairs and crystal candlesticks, the last broken in the rough transit.

The second waggon contained food ; this was dealt out to the wounded. M. de Zuylestein's men, who had spent the day outside the walls of Utrecht while their leader argued desperately with the magistrates, were fresher, and had ravaged some provisions from the neighbouring farms ; but the bulk of the men had been without food twelve hours or more.

They attempted to set up such tents as they had with them, but a strong wind rising when the rain ceased hurled poles and canvas to the ground, and scattered the camp-fires in handfuls of sparks.

No news reached them of either de Louvignies or Count Hornes, but a messenger got through the enemy's lines with

a desperate appeal from Prince John Maurice at Muiden, where the starved troops were in a state of mutiny and threatening to desert to the French.

"— do not be surprised," his letter to the Captain General concluded, "if your next news is that we have all been cut to pieces."

And Muiden was the key to Amsterdam.

The Prince said nothing to this; he said nothing when he heard that traitors had possession of Utrecht, though he had fought desperately for a day to save the city.

His containment now was as marked as had been his fervour and ardour in the battle.

Count Königsmarck came to tell him that a young Frieslander of a republican family claimed the command of one of the surviving companies, and that it was against all precedent.

"I promised it," said William.

The ensign got his troop, but he was no longer a republican.

For the night the officers were disposed in such shelter as they could find in the farms and sheds. The Prince, William Bentinck, M. de Zuylestein, M. Beverningh, and Matthew Bromley shared the kitchen of a humble dwelling; a pleasant place hung with the bright-coloured pictures, the patterned prints, the gay china no such Dutch home lacked.

In the chimney corner stood a spinning-wheel, and on a high-backed chair lay a child's doll, for the family had fled with the swiftness of fear into the town. Two fat tallow candles burnt on the mantelpiece, and on the glazed white hearth a fire of sticks had been kindled, over which M. Bentinck was boiling some sour wine he had discovered, trying to render it more palatable by toasting slices of sour bread.

M. Beverningh and M. Zuylestein sat at the polished, round table, their wet cloaks over their chairs, between them a couple of pistols and another candle in a brass stick.

In the deep window-seat, half shaded by the curtain, sat the Prince, his face averted from the room.

An inner door was open on a small bedroom, ill-lit by a hanging lamp; on the black-and-white tiled floor stood a linen chest, flung open on fine tumbled sheets, and in the wall-place was a bed, the blue curtains drawn.

There lay Matthew Bromley, hidden in shadow save for his feet, over which the lamp-light fell making his silver buckles glimmer.

He was dying.

A heat that seemed to have substance, so oppressive it was, filled the two rooms. The window was wide open, but no relief came from the hot and heavy wind that blew in.

Suddenly the Prince rose and came to the table.

He wore no hat, and his long hair was tied back with a black ribbon taken from the ruffles in his sleeve.

His face was absolutely without colour, his lids drooping. He had been twenty-four hours in the saddle and without food; he held himself with an air of unutterable weariness.

His cuirass was stained with blood and rusted with the rain, his cravat undone, his scarf and sash shot and slashed to rags.

His right arm was cut, and he had rent away part of his full sleeve to tie it up with, the tattered laces and ribbons hung down over his hand; his boots and spurs were caked with mud; he held his heavy sword from the floor, and, as he reached the table, unstrapped it, and laid sword and baldric across a chair.

He looked at M. Beverningh, at his uncle Zuytlestein. Neither said anything.

Slowly he went over to M. Bentinck.

"How is Bromley?" he asked in a low voice.

"The same—it cannot last long."

"Is there no surgeon to be found?"

M. Bentinck shrugged his shoulders.

"We had but two."

"And they?"

"Dead or captured."

"And the clergymen?"

"There are three going about among the wounded, but Matthew Bromley is not a Calvinist."

"I had forgotten."

M. Bentinck rose from his knees; his splendid dress was soiled and tarnished, his bright good looks marred by fatigue.

"I am thinking of Your Highness."

"I am very well, but I am sorry for Matthew Bromley."

"He is not the only one."

"The cause was not his," answered the Prince wearily.

"And he is a man who loves his life."

With that he took one of the candles and went softly into the inner room where his gentleman lay.

The bed was set in the wall, and could be concealed by drawing a sliding panel; it was fragrantly clean, but dark and close.

The Englishman's head was propped up on two pillows, the upper part of him concealed in shadow.

His coat had been removed and his wound dressed by William Bentinck's unskilled care; the blood had soaked through the linen swathings and stained the neat, flowered coverlet.

William approached, shading the candle with his hand.

"How does it go with you?" he asked.

Matthew Bromley moved his head restlessly.

"How hot it is!" he murmured; then, "I would they did not build their beds in their walls here——"

"We could do no better," answered the Prince gently.

"Who is it?" came faintly.

"I, William of Nassau."

Mr. Bromley made a little sound of pleasure.

"Ah, Your Highness——"

The Prince set the candle on the chair behind him.

"I am sorry to see you like this, Bromley," he said.

The Englishman's voice came faintly from the pillow—

"No matter for me—but it has been a disastrous day."

The Prince held back the curtain.

"It was no quarrel of yours, my poor fellow," he answered.

Matthew Bromley smiled; his careless face had changed into a look of bewildered grieving.

"You had better have gone home," said William gently.

"It was against . . . the French."

He closed his eyes and made an effort with his strength—

"I am sorry we were beaten."

"That may be mended."

"But nothing can mend me—ah!"

He spoke in an absent and regretful voice.

They could hear the warm wind without and the groanings of the wounded who lay in the outhouses.

"Tell me what I can do," asked the Prince.

"Nothing."

The blue eyes opened vacantly.

"Your family——?"

"Yes, ah, yes."

"I will write to them——"

"In England . . . Kent."

"Is there anything I should say?"

"I cannot understand . . ."

William bent lower.

"Is there any message?"

The dying man answered in English—

"That balsam my mother sent . . ."

"What is it you say?"

"She never told me—how to use it."

He smiled aimlessly.

William was silent.

"How they fought——" There was only one tongue for him now.

William spoke in his careful English—

"I shall miss you, Bromley."

"Ah, I understand you . . . now."

The Prince smoothed his pillow.

"Don't trouble—" The Englishman moved his head restlessly. "—It isn't worth while——"

"I would give a deal to save you."

"Why . . . how hot it is . . ."

"Are you in pain?"

"I don't know."

"Shall I lift you up?"

"The address . . . M. Heenvliet knows——"

"Yes, yes——"

"Bromley Place . . . Kent."

"I will write——"

"We have a fish-pond . . . I liked it."

He seemed to be wandering.

"In the summer time it was pleasant there . . . Harry is at Oxford now."

The Prince turned away and picked up the candle.

"William," he called softly.

M. Bentinck came to the door.

"Have we nothing?" asked the Prince.

"M. Beverningh has discovered a bottle of beer in the cupboard and I am burning it. . . . M. de Zuylestein finds the wine drinkable, he says."

"But for Bromley, I mean."

M. Bentinck fetched a glass of the boiled wine and handed it to the Prince.

"We have nothing else."

William made no reply.

"You had best take some, sir; and the bread, too, is not so unpalatable."

The Prince gave the stuff a sick look.

"Get me some water," he said, putting it down.

"Well," answered M. Bentinck, with a grim smile, "M. de Zuylestein and M. Beverningh are making a meal."

The Prince returned to the bed, and in a while M. Bentinck brought the water in a dull green glass.

Matthew Bromley stared up at them.

"Am I dying?" he asked abruptly.

He took the water, drank with avidity, then murmured—

"I must write home."

M. Bentinck left the room. The heat seemed to increase.

Some one was reciting a psalm outside in a gabbling voice, another groaned bitterly.

The swinging lamp was going out with a harsh stench of oil.

The Prince crossed the room to quench it, as he moved Mr. Bromley called out rapidly—

"I was shot through the lungs in my first engagement; I died in a cottage outside Utrecht; I was shot through the lungs; I am writing to Harry." He suddenly laughed. "I am glad I saw those French players before I left the Hague . . . I shall never get another chance."

William had turned out the lamp, they were left with only the light of the tallow candle on the mantelpiece.

The Prince came back to his gentleman, who lay in a half stupor, pulling at his coverlet with clumsy fingers.

"Bromley," his young master bent over him, "you are dying . . . I must tell you. . . . We have no clergyman, but you could pray——"

"No Calvinist," muttered Mr. Bromley.

"God," said the Prince vehemently, "knows no creed."

Mr. Bromley gave a little sigh, as if his mind had suddenly cleared.

"Is not Your Highness in despair?" he asked weakly.

"Why?"

"Because the French beat us . . . and there seems no hope for you."

"How can I despair?" answered the young General. "God has me by the hand."

The dying man glanced at him sharply and curiously—

"Does Your Highness—believe—like that?"

William smiled.

"Could I live if I did not believe?"

Matthew Bromley's blue eyes were still fixed on him intently.

"I never thought of it—much—but I detain Your Highness——"

"No, no, there is nothing I can do till the dawn."

"In my coat——"

His voice failed.

"Yes?"

"There is a book—a Prayer-book."

"I will get it."

"If Your Highness could read it—in English."

William pressed his hand.

The wind struggled in the great barns outside, and the coarse yellow flame shuddered in the hot air from the high window.

In the kitchen could be seen M. Zuylestein asleep on the settle and M. Beverningh at the table sipping his boiled wine.

"There are some papers too," whispered Mr. Bromley. "Love-letters—and bills; burn them, they are so foolish."

The Prince turned over the stained and bloody coat and found the Anglican Prayer-book.

"I wonder why I brought it," said the Englishman vaguely.

William seated himself beside the bed and began turning over the unfamiliar leaves.

"The prayer for the departing," murmured Matthew Bromley.

The Prince put his hand to his forehead; his head was so heavy that he could hardly hold it up, and the scanty light scarcely permitted him to read the foreign print.

Matthew Bromley closed his eyes.

William had never looked on death before to-day, but he did not fail to mark that it was very near.

"What shall I read?" he asked.

"For the . . . sick."

Mr. Bromley moaned a little.

The Prince found the place, his tired but fervent voice came through the distraction of other sounds.

"Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of just men made perfect, after they are delivered from their earthly prisons; we humbly commend the soul of this Thy servant, our dear brother, into Thy hands——"

"Into Thy hands," whispered Mr. Bromley.

"—as into the hands of a faithful Creator, and most merciful Saviour; most humbly beseeching Thee, that it may be precious in Thy sight——"

The wind and the restless complainings without were unceasing. Mr. Bromley clasped his hands on his breast; the Prince read on carefully—

"—and teach us who survive, in this and like daily spectacles of mortality, to see how frail and uncertain our own condition is; and so to number our days, that we may seriously apply our hearts to that holy and heavenly wisdom, whilst we live here . . ."

"I read so ill, my poor English," murmured the Prince.

"No—I understand."

"—which may in the end bring us to life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord——"

"Amen."

Matthew Bromley's life was sinking fast; like a sea receding was the blue light in his eyes, each second farther away.

William went on his knees by the aperture of the bed.

"In Thee, Lord, have I put my trust; let me never be put to confusion, but rid me and deliver me in Thy righteousness; incline Thine ear unto me and save me——"

Mr. Bromley stretched out his cold, pale hand.

"I thank Your Highness."

"Do not think of me but of God."

The two young men, both so white, so haggard, so dishevelled, that the one drawing his last breath was hardly to be told from him who comforted, clasped hands in the hot shadows of the peasant's bed.

Mr. Bromley made a movement as if to draw the Prince towards him.

"I would I had lived to see Your Highness fortunate," he breathed. Then, "God . . . God . . . He is very pitiful . . ."

With that he sighed, three times—and died with the gentlest stilling of his breath.

The Prince drew back a little; then lifted Mr. Bromley's hands and crossed them on his breast.

Death had come so softly the pillow and coverlet were not disturbed by unavailing struggles nor was Matthew Bromley. He looked at rest.

The Prince pulled the curtain, and went to the stained velvet coat hanging over the high-backed chair.

In the pockets were letters, charms, and a snuff-box full of gold pieces.

William burnt the papers without reading them, and left the money and the Prayer-book on the chair.

Then he re-entered the kitchen. M. Bentinck was smoking a short clay.

"Matthew Bromley is dead," said the Prince.

"Poor soul!" answered William Bentinck. M. Beverningh was silent, and M. de Zuylestein asleep.

The Prince went to the window, coughing; M. Bentinck guiltily knocked out his pipe.

"What will you do to-morrow?" he asked.

"Get into Utrecht," said the Captain General briefly.

M. Beverningh looked up.

"If they will not defend the place they shall at least provision us," added the Prince.

Now Beverningh spoke.

"They will refuse us admission, Highness."

"It is my will and purpose to enter Utrecht to-morrow," answered William.

"Meanwhile——" M. Bentinck began, when the door was flung open and a young officer entered.

"Your Highness——"

He was agitated, breathing hard, and carried a pistol.

William came forward out of the shadows.

"What is it?"

"The Friesland regiments, Sir . . . they mutiny. I know not what to do."

M. Bentinck rose and softly latched the swinging door.

"Why do they mutiny?" asked the Prince.

"Sir, they say they are starving, and that it is but waiting here to be cut to pieces, and that the country is lost, and that

they will submit to the King of France and go back to their homes——"

"You speak as if not over confident yourself, Mynheer," said William, holding up his head.

"Truly, Your Highness, affairs are desperate."

"If we despair they are desperate indeed," replied the Captain General sternly. "It is our duty, Mynheer, not to despair."

"But these men?" asked M. Beverningh.

"I will go and speak to them," said the Prince quietly.

"Your Highness has done enough," protested William Bentinck.

"I do what it would seem there is no one else to do," was the answer.

He picked up his cloak from the window-seat and flung it over his tattered uniform.

"Have you no lantern?" he asked the officer.

"Sir, the moon is up."

M. Bentinck, with an impatient look at M. Zuytlestein, who was still very contentedly asleep, made ready to accompany the Prince, and the three started out through the encampment.

The wind had dropped, sweeping away the clouds with it, and a full moon was high in the dark sky.

Tents had now been rigged up here and there; several men were moving about with lanterns, many sleeping on the ground; under a little grove of alders a row of horses were tied, beyond them could be distinguished the gaunt shapes of waggons and guns.

Unnoticed the three made their way to the other end of the meadows where the Frieslanders were encamped.

There were perhaps three hundred of them, and they sat about sullenly among their dead.

They had refused to see after their horses, to bury the corpses, even to tend the wounded; their one answer was to demand food of their officers, and to repeat they would not be cut to bits by the French.

The defection of Utrecht had set an ill example. If that

great city was afraid of Louis what could others do but make their peace with him? . . .

An officer on horseback rode out when he saw the little company advancing.

"Here are the Prince and M. Bentinck," said his messenger.

The other dismounted.

"Ah, Your Highness—I was loath to send to you—but the men are beyond all management, and I fear if the disaffection spreads to the others——"

"You did very well, Mynheer——"

The Prince coughed, and resumed, "I will speak to them."

"Will Your Highness take my horse?"

William mounted and rode in amongst the men, M. Bentinck and the two officers at his stirrup.

Not knowing him they let him pass without a salute; they believed that it was one of their own captains.

William suddenly halted and bent from the saddle towards a little group who stood whispering together.

"Do you not know me?" he asked.

They fell apart and looked up.

His face was quite clear in the moonlight; for he wore no hat, and his hair was tied back in his neck.

"I think that you know me," he said. "Go fetch the others, for I would speak to you."

They moved back, half reluctantly.

"All these men have arms, Highness," warned the officer.

"They will not turn them on me," answered the Prince.

But M. Bentinck felt uneasy; for William had drawn rein on a slope of the ground, he was an unprotected object for any carbine that might be levelled out of the shadows of the camp.

The news seemed to spread with silent swiftness.

The men gathered in groups of fours and fives, forming up without noise until there was a thick semicircle of them round the Prince.

It seemed they would listen to what he had to say, at least.

William looked keenly over his mute, half-seen audience, and began to speak in his low, deliberate voice—

"I hear that you have fallen into mutinies and disobedience, which is an ill thing for soldiers, and that you do complain of hardships, thereby giving yourselves an evil distinction, for you are the only companies of mine who have so complained.

"I do entreat you remember yourselves, for as surely as those that stand by me will come to ultimate glory, so surely will I have the lives of those who rebel."

He paused a moment, and there was the slightest movement among the soldiers.

"You bore yourselves very well to-day against great odds, and for the discomforts you endure I am sorry, but I do tell you this, you shall have food soon, for if the city of Utrecht is false we will get provisions from Amsterdam, for I have sent there to raise money on my private credit, and as long as I have a guilder you shall not starve. Now for another matter. I hear some of you talk of deserting to King Louis; now any man who does that is a coward and a traitor and a fool, for the French are unjust and cruel masters, and would make slaves of you—a thing which is hateful to you.

"For love of liberty is a strong thing in this country, and ye were born free . . .

"My great-grandfather made this State, rescuing it from the most bloody tyranny of Rome, and the Princes of his race have always followed his example, to the great good of this people, and while I lead you, I tell you, you shall never be slaves nor subjected to France.

"And I pray you to be of good hope and of a cheerful spirit, for certainly I will deliver you from foreign dominion.

"Alva, Don Juan, Farnese failed, and shall Turenne and Condé succeed? . . . Philip was a great king, but we bitterly repulsed him, with God's grace and some valour.

"Think of these things, for they will hearten you and make you see how impossible it is that you should forsake your liberty and your religion, which are such holy things that to die

for them would be a noble death, and no one but a very paltry man fears to die well . . .

"Now, I ask you to ponder what I have said, and obey your officers and do your duty ; and such of you as do not I will certainly hang, for he who is not repentant now is no better than a traitor.

"And as for what I have said about the provisions, you have my word on it, and therefore may rest tranquil, for I am Nassau."

As he finished there was a murmur and a sound of many men drawing their breath.

"Ye who are obedient, lay down your arms," said the Prince.

Instantly carbines, bayonets, and pistols clattered on the ground.

"Take them up and hold them ready to use again as you used them to-day," flashed William. "For God and the United Provinces !"

A long, sobbing shout rose from the Frieslanders :—

"God, the United Provinces, and William of Nassau !"

The Prince waved his hand to them and rode away as three hundred voices broke into St. Aldegonde's hymn of liberty, "William of Nassau."

At the edge of the encampment the Prince dismounted ; after his long speech he was very silent.

"Your Highness has utterly quelled all discontent," murmured the officer. "God keep Your Highness—they were greatly moved——"

"Good-night," said William ; "they will obey now, Mynheer."

He took M. Bentinck's arm and turned across the camp.

Neither spoke a word until they reached the cottage, then William uttered some incoherent sentence as M. Bentinck unlatched the door.

"Your Highness is ill !"

The Prince took a step forward and fell into his friend's arms, completely unconscious.

"My God !" whispered Bentinck.

He pushed open the door and called M. Beverningh, who came showing a frightened face.

M. Bentinck lifted the Prince easily enough and carried him into the kitchen.

M. de Zuytlestein was awake now and poring over a map on the polished table.

He got to his feet with a little exclamation under his breath.

As they had no manner of bed or couch they laid the Prince on some cloaks along the floor.

In a bewildered way they looked at each other.

"You should never have let him go," said M. Beverningh. "A strong man could not have stood what he has put upon himself——"

"You made no protest," retorted William Bentinck.

"What influence have I?"

"No—nor any man." M. Bentinck frowned. "Well, if he falls sick there is an end to all of it—for he alone holds us together."

Catching up the candle he flickered it across the Prince's unconscious face.

M. de Zuytlestein was unbuckling his nephew's rusty armour.

"He is not wounded," he said; "ye should never have let him go out again——"

"If ye had been awake, Mynheer, maybe ye could have stopped him," replied M. Bentinck angrily.

Much of their reserve and fortitude was suddenly shaken by this collapse. The despair his personal influence had kept at bay began to seize hold of them; of the three the lawyer was the calmest.

He put his hand to the Prince's forehead and untied his cravat.

"It is what the foreigners call the Dutch fever," he said.

This sickness, deadly and common, was well known to all of them; it was in symptom like a tertian ague, caused, strangers declared, by the mists rising in summer from the low, damp lands—alternate burning and shivering, with high fever and fierce pains.

"What can we do?" asked M. de Zuylestein helplessly.

"With nothing we can do nothing," replied William Bentinck.

It was surprising to reflect that a fortnight could reduce them from the luxury and ease of the Hague to this kitchen, with the Prince lying unconscious at their feet and not so much as a cordial to revive him.

"Where is Matthew Bromley——?" began M. Bentinck, then checked himself, remembering that the Englishman lay dead in the adjoining chamber.

M. de Zuylestein cursed the baggage waggons for having lost their way, and was moving to summon outside assistance. M. Bentinck checked him.

"No one can do any more; if you let the news abroad there will be a panic——"

"And what of the mutiny? Had he checked it?" asked M. Beverningh, who was on his knees beside the Prince.

"Yes—he can do anything with the men."

"What did he say?"

"Not much—he spoke stiffly I thought, and proudly."

"Sincerity needs no arts," murmured Beverningh.

They had water, but M. Beverningh was against William Bentinck's suggestion of bathing the Prince's forehead; it increased the fever he said.

M. de Zuylestein was for bleeding him, but since they had no lancet that also was abandoned.

One of the candles burnt down, and they could find no other, so had to manage by the dismal light of one.

"If he takes the fever," said M. Beverningh, "we are truly undone."

M. Bentinck had found a withered brown shell of a rose inside William's waistcoat.

"He has his sentiments," he remarked, "although he guards them fiercely—he picked this from the tree his mother, the Princess Royal, planted, the last time he was at the 'Huis ten bosch.'"

"I think he is this country's sole hope," said M. de Zuylestein. "There is no one to take his place."

The hot night was wearing away ; the first pallid glow of dawn stole through the window and fell on the calm, unconscious face of the young Captain General.

Once or twice he moved heavily as if he were asleep. M. Bentinck knelt beside him on the glazed tiles ; felt his wrist helplessly, and pushed back the tangled, damp auburn locks from his brow.

Their last candle burnt to the daylight, then spluttered out in the brass stick.

William suddenly opened his eyes and half sat up.

He was shivering, and the hand M. Bentinck held was fever hot.

"Bentinck," he said, "we must get into Utrecht to-day . . ."

And on these words he fainted again.

M. Beverningh looked at M. de Zuylestein.

"Pray God King Louis' terms will be reasonable," he said grimly ; "for whatever they are we must accept them."

CHAPTER XIII

THE FANATICS

M. VAN OUVENALLER snuffed the candle, took off his glasses, wiped them, and set them again on his nose and took up his long quill pen.

It was about eleven at night and very hot; the window was set open on the June dark, on the expanse of the Vyverberg and the trees of the Kneuterdyk Avenue beyond the water.

The Binnenhof was empty save for this room where John de Witt and his clerk sat completing the day's task.

It was a little chamber, simply furnished, its sole adornment several handsome pictures of flowers and still life.

The candlesticks, taper-holders, and ink-stands were of glittering brass, and the only bright objects in the severe, sombre surroundings of John de Witt.

He wore black velvet, and leant back a little in his stiff, carved chair. His full brown eyes were fixed on his clerk, who was finishing the notes on the day's affairs which were to be used in the Grand Pensionary's speech to the Assembly to-morrow.

"Read over to me what you have there," said John de Witt.

Both men looked exhausted. The work put upon the Grand Pensionary was more than he could do; he had sent for his cousin Vivien to help him in duties that began to accumulate beyond his strength, but until the arrival of the Pensionary of Dordt he had to put through his labours unaided.

Reinier Van Oudenaller moved the candles so that they

escaped the draught from the open window, for a slight breeze was rising.

"The Prince of Orange," he read from his notes, "entered Utrecht yesterday, the people having overawed the magistrates. His Highness, who was sick of an aguish fever, had a scene with the town council, and, on their refusing to burn the suburbs or to make any defence, he abandoned them and fell back on Bodegraven, saying he would not risk his men in the defence of such selfish, unpatriotic people—he forced them to provision his forces, however. M. Beverningh writes in a despairing strain."

John de Witt rested his elbow on the arm of his chair and his cheek in his palm; his gaze was turned on the peaceful darkness beyond the window.

M. Van Oudenaller gave a little dry cough and resumed—

"*Nota*, that the Prince William lost many men in a desperate brush with the contingent of M. de Rochfort, and that Prince John Maurice protests that he cannot hold out much longer in Maestricht—more men if possible to be sent.

"*Nota*, that the several States demand their own troops for their particular protection, the great inconvenience of this to be put to Their Noble Mightinesses. Jealousy of other provinces that they pay men to defend Holland—but this must be; *nota*, that the Hague and Amsterdam are the chief towns and must be defended at any cost."

John de Witt looked across the candles at his secretary.

"Add that the other States be reminded Holland bears the chief cost."

The pen scratched a moment, then M. Van Oudenaller resumed—

"The Dutch envoys received violently by His Highness the Prince William, and coldly by His Christian Majesty; M. de Groot's report not hopeful. M. de Louvois appears unreasonable; M. Van Odyk, fearful of displeasing the Prince and the State of Zeeland, withdraws from the embassy; M. de Groot returns to the Hague to obtain full powers, King

Louis refusing to treat on any other terms; *nota*, that Their Noble Mightinesses be urged to grant these full powers; *nota*, that M. de Groot is a very able and honest man."

The Grand Pensionary was again looking out at the night.

"Go on," he said in a quiet voice.

"State of alarm in the country, shops closed, business suspended; *nota*, a more resolute front to our advantage; rumours that the Jews of Amsterdam have offered M. de Condé two million if he will spare their quarter, and that the goldsmiths are making a gold basin in which to present the key of their city to the King of France; *nota*, speak to the Deputies of Amsterdam to contradict these rumours."

The secretary snuffed the candle again, turned over a leaf, and continued—

"Riots becoming serious, the magistrates to be exhorted to firmness; M. Cornelius de Witt hath permission, on account of his sickness, to leave the Fleet; *nota*, that he hath waived the salute he was entitled to and presented the powder to Dordt, where it is very scarce; *nota*, that the States thanked him for his noble conduct at the battle off Southwold town, and that I reply for him, he being abed in Dordt; *nota*, that there are riots in Dordt, and the portrait of M. Cornelius de Witt hath been cut from its frame in the town hall; protests to be made with regard to the weakness of authority."

"Underline that," interrupted John de Witt, "for it is of all things serious."

Van Ouvenaller obeyed.

"*Nota*, that the English envoys are dissolute and frivolous men, and come not for any honest desire for peace but to see their master has a share of the spoil; *nota*, that Viscount Halifax is the most moderate and the least trusted by his Government, that the Earl of Arlington was in the treaty of Dover, and that the Duke of Buckingham is jealous of the Prince James of Monmouth who has the command he desires; *nota*, most hopes from him; *nota*, fear they have secret offers to make to the Prince William of Orange, to his advantage, but not to that of the States; *nota*, that there is a popular idea

that if the stadtholdership were reinstated King Charles would make peace ; *nota*, this false, he makes war not for his nephew's sake, but because of the treaty with France.

"*Nota*, that the alliances with Spain and Brandenburg go well.

"*Nota*, that the Prince William of Orange is popular in England ; *nota*, not to trust him, M. Fagel has changed front and is utterly against peace ; *nota*, he has received instructions from the Prince.

"Fresh levies to be sent to Groningen ; *nota*, that the French, especially M. de Luxembourg, behave with great cruelty, thereby filling the people with terror.

"*Nota*, confidence to be restored to the States by resolute speaking, despair a worse enemy than the French.

"*Nota*, that the clamour for the Prince of Orange grows, and that the people seem to put more trust in him than in God.

"*Nota*, that two days of fasting be appointed till God be pleased to guide us out of these troubles.

"*Nota*, that the Princess Amalia petitions the State for leave to ask the King of France's protection for her property at the Hague ; *nota*, not to be granted, as it would show despair of our success.

"*Nota*, that one Mynheer Sylvius arrived from England on a secret mission to the Prince ; *nota*, that this looks ill.

"These notes made Tuesday, June 21, 1672, at the Binnenhof."

John de Witt drew out his handkerchief and wiped his brow.

"How hot it is, Van Oudenaller," he remarked.

The clerk folded up the memoranda.

"Have we finished now, Mynheer ?" he asked wearily.

"No, I have another letter to write."

M. Van Oudenaller pulled out a fresh sheet of paper.

"A moment," said the Grand Pensionary. "I must collect myself."

He rose and went to the window.

The summer night had soothed or silenced the sorrows and passions that had raged all day; gone were the threatening men, the weeping women, the clatter of the burgher companies, the passing to and fro of the town guard, the people who had pressed to the Binnenhof for news, the crowds who had swept through the distracted streets clamouring for the Prince of Orange. Binnenhof and Buitenhof were both dark save for this one light in John de Witt's window.

The stars shone through a fine vapour; the glow of the lamps round the Vyverberg was half obscured by the thick leaves of the wych elms and the limes, which sent up a luscious fragrance to the open window.

John de Witt stood quite still. The black velvet and falling lace collar threw into relief his romantic good looks; the candid and melancholy features that were strangely unlined and simple in expression for one whose years had been so laboriously full.

He looked less than his years, partly by reason of the heavy brown hair that still fell so thickly on to his shoulders, and the full but shapely mouth whose lips lay together with a fresh and youthful set of gentleness.

"Who is it you will write to, Mynheer?" asked Van Oudenaller.

"To M. Beverningh."

"And to His Highness?"

"No," answered John de Witt.

The hot stillness had a lulling quality; lassitude was in the perfume of the silent darkness.

For once John de Witt seemed reluctant to turn to his work. He stood with one hand resting on the mullions and his eyes were dreamy.

M. Van Oudenaller yawned.

"I remember," remarked the Grand Pensionary, "how it was said to me—twenty years ago—when I took up this office—'Thou must not care henceforth, whether thou be laid in thy coffin whole or in pieces.'"

The clerk lifted a startled face.

"Latterly I have thought of it," continued his master. "How the people hate me . . . I never thought that I should be so hated."

"Mynheer!—they are but fanatics——"

"Fanatics," echoed John de Witt, with a sad smile. "They think I sell them to M. de Louvois."

He pressed his hand to his heart as if he was wounded there.

"When they took this office from my predecessor Cats, he thanked God on his knees for removing such a heavy burden from him. . . . Well, he was never hated as I am."

"Mynheer, it is but the vulgar who rail against you."

John de Witt turned his full eyes on the secretary.

"It is the People," he said mournfully. "The People of this Republic . . . if they trusted me I could save them yet . . . if they trusted me——"

He returned to the table and took up the pen.

"I must make some answer to that pamphlet, *Advice to every Faithful Hollander*, there are accusations there must not be overlooked. Their High Mightinesses will do me that justice, to silence some of these lying tongues—remind me, Van Oudenaller . . . many thousand copies have been sold, here alone——"

He spoke proudly and frowned a little. His clerk knew that the malice, detraction, and bitterness surrounding him harassed his noble spirit sorely. He walked like an unarmed man among gathered spears that might any moment be turned against his heart.

"And is this all we have to do to-night, Mynheer?" asked the clerk.

"Yes."

Van Oudenaller began to put up the papers in the dispatch bag; when he rose he walked stiffly, by reason of his long sitting.

John de Witt's pen travelled rapidly over the smooth paper. Once he began his eager spirit did not lack for means of expression, his unwearied soul held his tired body to the task.

His letter to Jerome Beverningh ended thus—

“We must consider Amsterdam as the heart of the State, by which succour may be carried to all its members; so that, under God’s guidance, we may fight against the enemy for our country to the last man, and with Dutch constancy.”

He folded and sealed his letter, then rose again.

It was now nearly midnight and the heat increasing; the faint breeze had completely dropped.

“You will go home now?” asked Van Oudenaller anxiously. “It is so late, and you, Mynheer, have laboured exceedingly to-day.”

“It is not the labour that irks but the payment,” answered John de Witt. “I learn with sorrow the truth of the ancient saying they applied to the Roman Republic—‘*Prospera omnes sibi vindicant, adversa uni imputantur.*’ Ah, Van Oudenaller, they say from the very pulpits that I would sooner let the country go to the French than see the Prince of Orange governor of it.”

“The Calvinists are all ardent in his favour,” replied the secretary; “naturally, for he is very zealous for their creed.”

John de Witt took his hat and cloak from a chair.

“I hope my sister hath not sat up for me.”

“She always does,” answered Van Oudenaller, drawing the string of the dispatch-bag.

“To-night I am so late.”

He waited while the clerk locked up the desk, then extinguished all the candles but one, which he took up and carried into the outer room.

There, by the dim light of a lamp, sat his servant asleep.

“Van den Wissel,” said John de Witt.

The man woke with a start and a confused excuse.

“No matter,” answered his master. “I am going home now.”

He gave the servant the candle, and the three traversed the silent corridors of the Binnenhof.

In the courtyard was a little delay while Van den Wissel lit a torch with which to guide them home.

As the chimes of the Groote Kerk struck twelve, they set out across the Buitenhof, the servant ahead bearing the torch, and Van Oudenaller following with the dispatch-bag.

The outer air and the movement refreshed the Grand Pensionary. He found the dark night and the darker outlines of the fine buildings grateful to his tired eyes, the silence pleasant after the scratching of the quills and the weary voice of the little clerk.

His anxious thoughts took a more peaceful turn; his pious fancy imagined the serene stars promised protection from the God they concealed.

But as he neared the Gevangenpoort he must needs think of John Van Olden Barnenveldt and gloomy auguries.

They turned under the prison, through the low gate on which it was built; the spreading light of the torch showed the heavy walls closely confining them, and John de Witt shivered in his velvet.

He was glad when they reached the trees surrounding the Vyver.

It was solitary, as always at this time of night, but he thought he heard an unaccountable sound.

"Van Oudenaller," he spoke over his shoulder, "do you hear anything?"

"Nothing, Mynheer," was the sleepy answer.

"I thought I heard some one draw a sword," replied John de Witt, peering into the shadows of the trees.

Even as he spoke there was a great cry from his servant; the torch was swung up into the air, where it scattered sparks across the blackness, then dashed to the earth; some dark shapes leapt forward . . .

"Ah!" cried John de Witt, with a quick intake of his breath.

"We have been waiting for you," answered a youthful voice, "watching your light yonder . . . traitor!"

"M. de Witt!" yelled the clerk dismally; then he was silent suddenly, and the Grand Pensionary heard him fall.

It was quite dark. He stepped back against the railings and called his servant; a man quickly closed with him.

"I am unarmed," he said. "Are you an assassin?"

His opponent flung himself on him and thrust his sword viciously at him, wounding him in the throat.

Taken by surprise as he was, John de Witt turned, seized his assailant, and hurled him off.

"Van den Wissel!" he called again; but the only answer came from two others of the ambuscade, who rushed to the assistance of the one the Grand Pensionary had thrown. He had now three against him; he set his back against the railings and fought them off with his bare hands, proudly saying nothing, though every moment he received a fresh wound.

It could not last long. As he turned to face one, another stabbed him in the back and he fell silently, striking his head violently against the railings of the Vyver.

Hoarse, broken whispers came from the murderers—

"Is he dead?"

"He fell . . ."

"Yes—he is dead."

"Who struck him?"

"I—Jacob Van der Graef."

"Hush!—I cannot see any one."

"No—it is too dark."

"What of the servant?"

"Is that you, Bruyn?"

"Yes——"

"The lot fell to you——"

"Well, I struck him——"

"I killed him——"

"So die all friends of King Louis!"

"Hush!"

"Ah!—I am treading on him——"

"My God! I feel giddy——"

"Come away——"

"Have you the dispatch-bag?"

"Yes——"

"And the clerk?"

"Here."

"Dead?"

"I do not know."

"He did not see us?"

"I think not——"

"Then leave him——"

"I have lost my sword——"

"Well, come away——"

"I cannot leave it here."

"I am wounded——"

"Where is Borrebagh?"

"Here."

"Where shall we go?"

"To Van Dyck's house."

"Make haste."

So four hoarse voices passed to and fro as the assassins stumbled among their victims; then they made off across the Plaats with all the haste terror, exultation, and their wounds would permit them.

Once more it was utterly silent on the Plaats.

The great chimes of the Groote Kerk struck through a warm stillness.

John de Witt sat up and fumbled in the dark.

Emptiness and perfect blackness seemed about him; he put his hand to his head and felt it warm and wet.

"Van Oudenaller," he called faintly.

There was no answer.

By the aid of the railings he got to his feet.

His right shoulder gave him exquisite pain; his strength seemed to have been utterly robbed from him.

He clutched at his collar that was all sticky with blood, and gave a soft exclamation.

"God be with me if this is death," he said dazedly.

Then across the night he saw the light they always left for him in his room—at home.

A sudden waft of perfume from the limes came to his nostrils.

"I will not die in the streets, like a gallant in a tavern

brawl," he thought, and forced his failing strength to drag him on. Clutching the railings, the tree-trunks, staggering, falling once or twice to his knees, John de Witt gained his house at the corner of the Kneuterdyk Avenue.

As he leant, exhausted, against the door-post it occurred to him that his appearance would frighten his sister and daughter, who might still be up.

He tried to fling his velvet mantle over himself, but could not.

A great giddiness came over him ; he opened the door and stumbled into the quiet hall.

At the bottom of the stairs stood Anna de Witt in a white gown, her fair hair shining in the glimmer of the lamp she held.

"Oh !" she cried brokenly. "O—oh !" and ran forward.

John de Witt was blood from head to foot ; his collar soaked from the wound in his throat, his hands red and torn, his shirt stained, his forehead bruised, and the hair clotted with the slow drippings from the gash in his head.

He tried to reassure his daughter.

"Dearest . . . I have escaped . . . why, this is nothing at all—get me a surgeon, Anna——"

The girl did not lose her presence of mind ; she made no lamentations.

"Aunt Johanna !" she called strongly. "Aunt Johanna !"

Madame Van Beveren appeared in the door of the dining-room where she had been preparing her brother's supper.

"Father is wounded," said Anna de Witt.

Johanna stepped into the hall, and her eyes fell on the Grand Pensionary who supported himself against the wall.

"God have mercy on us !" she exclaimed.

She had a blue china bowl of peaches in her hands ; in a mechanical way she set it down on the table where Anna had placed the lamp.

"John,"—she caught her brother by the arm,—"*come upstairs.*"

"I was attacked on the Vyverberg," said the Grand Pensionary thickly. "How they hate me——"

"Anna, rouse your grandfather—the servants—send one for the physicians of the States—and M. Wilde—— John, can you get upstairs?"

Anna dashed into the dining-room and rang the bell; sped upstairs and beat on Jacob de Witt's door.

When she returned to the hall she found John de Witt senseless in the chair outside the dining-room door and his sister bending over him, her spotless gown stained with blood as she strove to stanch the wound in his throat.

In a moment the whole house was in a commotion. M. de Witt had only two men-servants, one of whom had been with him at the Binnenhof; but the coachman and the other private clerk, M. Bacherus, carried him up to his room; then hurried out with torches to fetch a doctor and search for the other victims.

Jacob de Witt lost his usual resignation; he wrung his hands and cried out for Cornelius, for he was very old.

Anna led him gently away.

"God does not will that my father should die," she said. "We must not complain, but rather rejoice that through a miracle he hath been saved."

"God's will be done," said the old man, but the tears rolled down his pale cheeks.

Anna sat beside him, holding his hand, in the dining-room, where the untouched supper showed pleasant in the candle-light, while the doctors went upstairs.

Presently M. Wilde entered.

"The wounds are not mortal," he said. "M. de Witt will live."

PART III

THE CRISIS

“Since Octavius the world had seen no such instance of precocious statesmanship.”—LORD MACAULAY, *History of England*.

“Nobile par fratrum, sævo furor ore trucidat.”—Motto on a medal in commemoration of August 20, 1672.

CHAPTER I

THE CAMP OF THE CONQUEROR

SIR GABRIEL SYLVIUS arrived at Doesburg to find that King Louis was already on the road to Utrecht; immediately came news of his entry into that town and his choice of headquarters at Zeyst, the castle of M. Van Odyk.

The alarmed States, deprived of the leadership of John de Witt, who was confined to his bed with a raging fever from his wounds, had given M. de Groot full powers to treat with King Louis, and he, despite the violent remonstrances of M. Fagel, repaired with M. Van Ghent to the camp of the conqueror on a desperate attempt to obtain honourable terms for his distracted country.

Sir Gabriel Sylvius retraced his steps over the conquered and despairing provinces of Overijssel and Guelders, where M. de Luxembourg was making the people taste the full severities of military rule, and took lodgings in Utrecht.

The day before his arrival M. de Groot had returned from the Hague, hastily, for fear the Orange party should prevent his departure, and Sir Gabriel found the old castle of Zeyst the head of the negotiations that were to decide the fate of the United Provinces.

Louis, having taken Utrecht, and forced the Dutch to the humiliation of returning M. de Groot with full powers to treat for peace, deigned to allow a truce.

The Prince of Orange, with the remnant of his forces, lay at Newerbrugge, between Leyden and Haarlem; and M. de Turenne, sweeping the Protestants down with the fervour of a convert, made preparations to annihilate him should the

negotiations fall through. He declared His Majesty should dine at the Hague within the next month, as friend or foe, and swore it before the Saints he had recently recognised.

He was the more eager as M. de Condé, wounded at the passage of the Rhine, had retired to Chantilly, and his now was the sole glory of the war.

Sir Gabriel sent his name and credentials to M. de Louvois, and to the surprise of his secretary, Florent Van Mander, the acknowledgment was an instant command to attend His Majesty.

To Florent's further surprise they were received with great courtesy by the gorgeous officials who shed splendour on the French Court. Van Mander knew that the Dutch envoys had been met with a supreme haughtiness; he held M. de Groot a much greater man than Sir Gabriel Sylvius, who was, after all, only the secret messenger of a citizen.

But Louis made a fine distinction between the representative of a confederation of traders whom he had always disliked, despised, and now regarded as conquered, and William of Orange, his cousin, a Prince of the blood royal of England, a Grandee of the German Empire, the possessor of one of the finest private fortunes in Europe, and the owner of talents and qualities that might well fit him to join the galaxy of great names that shed lustre on the crown of Louis de Bourbon.

So the Prince's envoy was received graciously at the castle of Zeyst. He arrived there towards the close of a warm day, soon after His Majesty had returned from an inspection of Utrecht's fortifications; he was conducted, with his secretary, into one of the chambers that opened into the great dining-hall, where once M. Van Odyk had entertained his master.

Florent Van Mander had just crossed a conquered province and was lodged in a conquered city; he had seen the Host carried through the streets of Utrecht, and listened to the chants of the priests that had not been heard in the United Provinces since they drove out Farnese; he had seen his countrymen killed, spurned, insulted; he had seen their dwellings fired, their goods plundered; he had seen the burgomasters submit humbly to the omnipotent King; and

now he was looking on the inner side of this terrible army that had taken two provinces in so many weeks.

He made no comment; he had said very little since he left the Prince's camp. Sir Gabriel had an open manner that disguised complete reserve.

Florent fed his silence with rumours; of the wounding of M. de Witt, of the frantic state of feeling in Holland, of M. de Groot's desperate mission, of the arrival of the English envoys at the Hague; of the rapacity of M. de Louvois and the high-handed arrogance of his master: which things he considered and reflected upon day and night.

The castle was filled with French officers, splendid men of graceful manners. Van Mander found them as dazzling as the reports of their exploits; looking at them he felt that his country was non-existent, already a province of France, and he thought of William of Orange, and wondered why Sir Gabriel sought an audience with the conqueror.

Yet he believed that he knew.

The room they waited in was very handsomely hung with Flemish tapestry representing the story of the Unicorn, and furnished with inlaid Spanish pieces, for M. Van Odyk had wealth and good taste; the door into the next chamber was curtained with dark velvet, looped back, and from behind it came the sound of a man singing in a voice of a pleasant, medium quality.

He sang in English to the accompaniment of a lute.

Sir Gabriel walked up and down the room, glancing out of the deep windows he passed at the French soldiers in their gay uniforms filling the grey courtyard below.

He held his hat behind his back, and his shrewd, freckled face was set in lines of reflection.

Van Mander stared at the contorted figures on the arras, and listened to the clatter of horses and arms from without.

Above it all rose the near sound of the English song—

“Fairest Jane, all Janes excelling,
As my wish exceeds my skill,
Tears within your eyes are swelling,
I perceive you love me still!”

Sir Gabriel stopped by the window and frowned ; he was impatient at being kept waiting, even by His Majesty.

The singer paused, and seemed to fidget with the strings of his instrument that he played but moderately well.

"Sweetness best becomes your beauty,
Would you chide when we must part?
To the King belongs my duty
But to you belongs my heart."

Florent became curious to see who sang.

Sir Gabriel seemed self-absorbed, so he rose and moved so that he could see beyond the curtain into the inner room.

Just beyond the door he saw a young man, with one foot on a chair, holding across his knee a long-necked lute of shining ivory and satinwood.

His face was turned away. His person was a matter of great marvel and admiration to Florent, who had never seen anything more splendid than this cavalier.

He was a well-made man, very young, it seemed, and dressed in a dark rose brocade stiff with threads of silver and fastened with little knots of pearls ; round his waist was a white silk sash branched and fringed with silver ; his sleeves were unbuttoned and turned back over his rich needlework shirt, he wore a deep falling collar of Venetian lace and had fine ruffles of it at his wrists and knees.

A baldric of white velvet worked with jewels supported his slender sword with its curious gold hilt ; his close, high boots were of white leather, and his spurs gilt and fantastically shaped.

On the chair lay his gloves, trimmed with pearls, and his grey hat with an upright plume of white feathers and twisted with a silver cord fastened with a diamond brooch.

As Van Mander stared at him he seemed to become conscious of the scrutiny and turned his head, revealing the most beautiful face Florent had ever seen on man or woman.

Yet the sheer perfection of curving line and warm brown colour made not the chief attraction—this lay in the

expression, a charming combination of dare-devilry and sweetness, amiability and an innocent pride ; a face by no means effeminate, not very intelligent, but wholly lovely and lovable.

He had deep, soft brown eyes, straight, thick brows, a blunt English nose, a fair complexion, a beautiful and expressive mouth ; his thick, waving, chestnut hair fell in curls on to his shoulders and on the left side was tied with a knot of pink ribbon, a fashion Florent had not seen before.

His glance dwelt for a moment on the man observing him, then he turned away again, bending over the gleaming lute, but now without singing.

Sir Gabriel came from the window and Florent went over to him.

"Who is that cavalier in there—decked out like a woman?" he whispered.

"Is there one in there?"

"Yes, Mynheer, he who sang."

"Ah, yes——"

Sir Gabriel crossed the room and looked into the outer chamber.

The lutanist had set his instrument down and was gathering up his gloves and hat.

"It is the Englishman," said Sir Gabriel indifferently.

"The Englishman?"

"The Prince James of Monmouth."

The Duke heard his name and held back the curtain.

Sir Gabriel bowed.

"I await an audience with His Majesty, your Grace."

The Englishman gave them both the sweet smile he had for every one.

"Ah, Sir Gabriel—I did not think to see you again, so soon——"

"Nor I, your Grace."

"You come from the Prince of Orange?" asked Monmouth. He spoke in English, for he had no other language but a little imperfect French, and Florent, who could not understand what he said, dwelt on his glittering presence with a slow admiration.

"Yes," answered Sir Gabriel, with a little smile.

The Duke smiled again too, for no reason but good-nature.

"It has been a most marvellous campaign," he remarked, with his usual utter absence of tact. "A glorious beginning to the war——"

"For the King of France, your Grace," replied Sir Gabriel. "I am in the service of the Prince of Orange."

"Ah, yes—forgive me," said Monmouth sweetly; "but I hope it will be to His Highness' advantage also."

With which vague remark he changed the subject.

"Did you see my lord Arlington lately?"

"I crossed from Harwich with him."

His Grace half frowned.

"I should have heard from him. It is astonishing, Sir Gabriel, how difficult it is to get letters here."

"I can believe it, sir."

"My lord promised me supplies of money," said the Englishman frankly, "which I am already in need of——"

He paused a moment, and then added—

"But I can take you to His Majesty now, Sir Gabriel; I do not know why they make delays."

He pulled out a little crystal watch.

"It is near dinner-time—I will take you with me and you may see His Majesty before he dines."

"I shall be infinitely obliged, your Grace."

Monmouth included the secretary in a sweetly courteous glance, and begged them to follow him.

"Have you seen our soldiers, Sir Gabriel?" he asked as they proceeded through M. Van Odyk's handsome chambers. "By the Lord, 'tis a mighty fine army."

"I hear your Grace has distinguished yourself——"

"Oh, la! I don't know; it is vastly amusing being a general, Sir Gabriel."

They traversed a large ante-chamber filled with bowing pages and several officers of the King's Guard, who swept off their hats to the commander of the English forces.

"We are private and informal here," said Monmouth, who

was used to splendour ever since he could remember, and he opened the door into what had once been M. Van Odyk's private dining-room.

Sir Gabriel spoke to Florent in their own language over his shoulder.

"Now you will see a notable company."

This with a half-smile, as if the greatness there was such a stir about in Europe was not so dazzling on a near view.

It was a fine room; the ceiling beamed and painted, the walls panelled half-way up and above that hung with arras, save over the mantelshelf where the woodwork rose to the ceiling and formed a background for some dark family portraits.

There were velvet cushions in the deep window-seats and on the various carved chairs, and on a handsome buffet a rich collection of glass and gold and silver plate.

The usual quietly splendid and plainly costly chamber of a Dutch nobleman.

Seated at the head of the long table were two men, looking at a map: one young, scarcely at his prime, short, stoutly made, with a broad, vigorous face, and crimped brown hair falling on to his collar, dressed in black silk ruffled with red ribbons; the other a man of about thirty-five, also below the medium height, but slender, with a brown, handsome countenance, long effective eyes, an imperious mouth, and a hard expression of pride and obstinacy.

He wore green velvet, cut short in the French fashion to show his shirt, a gold baldric, and no ornament save a little brooch of pearls at his collar; his hair, chestnut colour and very fine, was frizzed to stand out in a multitude of little curls that fell to the middle of his shoulders.

Behind him, leaning on the back of his chair, stood another gentleman, eating chocolates, who was far more richly dressed, being nearly as extravagant as my lord Monmouth, but not near so handsome, though of a delicate face and a graceful carriage.

Standing by the hearth was a tall man very plainly habited in brown velvet, well past middle life, but erect and powerful,

with haggard features, fiery eyes, and an air of melancholy, dishevelled grandeur ; of these four he had the most appearance of greatness, and seemed to know it and to despise his surroundings.

Monmouth advanced, his hat in his hand.

The man in the green velvet turned in his chair.

"Sire, this is Sir Gabriel, the messenger from His Highness of Orange," said his Grace.

Florent stared, wondering which was the King, and attracted by the man on the hearth who took no notice of any.

"We are glad to see you, Monsieur," said the gentleman in green graciously, and then Florent knew that he was the King, for Sir Gabriel knelt and kissed his hand.

When he rose he motioned towards Florent.

"My secretary, Sire, who is in His Highness' favour."

Florent bowed very low.

"You are both very welcome to Zeyst," said Louis. "M. de Louvois," and he looked at the other seated at the table, "advertised us of your coming, and, pressed as we are with great affairs, we were very pleased to grant you an audience."

He had an air of great and distant dignity, but he made it plain that he wished to be gracious.

Sir Gabriel, in no way discomposed, bowed again.

"Sire, I am no accredited ambassador but the private agent of the Prince, as Your Majesty knows, and the first object of my mission was to the commissioners of His Majesty King Charles, but I received instructions from His Highness to wait on you, to tender you his duty, and to ask Your Majesty if you would be pleased to enlighten him, not as a subject of the United Provinces, but as a member of Your Majesty's House, what terms Your Majesty desires from the United Provinces?"

The King seemed pleased with this speech. M. de Louvois looked up sharply from his map.

Monmouth and the gentleman from behind Louis' chair had withdrawn together to a window embrasure, as if business was small matter to either of them.

"My cousin sends to us as a private person?" asked the King.

"As affairs stand, Sire, His Highness is no more."

Louis lifted his fine eyes.

"I have no quarrel with the Prince of Orange, Sir Gabriel. He hath been unjustly treated by these insolent States whose outrages on myself I have chastised, and His Britannic Majesty hath a great affection for him—I speak openly." He glanced at M. de Louvois.

"We war," he added arrogantly, "with a Republic that hath annoyed us, not with our cousin."

"I thank you, Sire."

M. de Louvois was listening intently.

"M. de Groot," continued Louis, "has our terms; if the States refuse them we shall advance on the Hague."

M. de Louvois spoke—

"Your countrymen think those terms severe, do they not, Sir Gabriel?"

"They are hardly blown abroad yet, M. le Marquis."

"I believe the States have the folly to complain of what we choose to dictate to them. But I think they will accept," remarked the King.

"I would remind Your Majesty this is no affair of His Highness."

"I know," assented Louis; "and I will tell you this for His Highness' private satisfaction, that his advantage is clearly looked to in these same Articles of Peace."

"I was assured so in London, Sire."

Louis faintly smiled.

"What is said in London I generally say first, Sir Gabriel."

The Prince's messenger bowed—

"I am well enough informed to know who rules Europe, Sire."

His Majesty accepted the compliment with serene graciousness.

"Let His Highness put his affairs in my hands and he will not repent it, Sir Gabriel."

M. de Louvois spoke again—

"I hear there is some talk of a revolution at the Hague—
M. de Witt has lost all prestige."

The Dutchman avoided a direct answer.

"His Highness is very popular."

Louis made a disdainful gesture with his hand.

"I can do better for my cousin than a confederacy of traders. Cadets of my House, Monsieur, need never lack glorious employment—the arms of France will always receive noble recruits."

He smiled again.

"The Prince's behaviour has pleased me; M. de Condé commended his generalship, it is thought that he might fashion into a fine soldier. He has made mistakes, notably in abandoning the Yssel, but I believe there were difficulties in his way——"

"Great difficulties, Sire."

"He wastes his talents in these uninhabitable marshes, we shall look to see him at Versailles."

His Majesty was invitingly pleasant.

"Tell this to my cousin: I hear he has ill-health—he must take care of it. I am anxious to see him, I hope he will attend me at the Hague after the conclusion of peace."

"Sire, after proving yourself as irresistible as Alexander you show yourself as generous as Scipio."

Louis said nothing to this. He covered his absolute ignorance, of which he was heartily ashamed, with a perfect manner and an unmoved front.

M. de Louvois smiled dryly; he wore the air of a ruler even of the King.

He administered the commissariat department, the brilliant management of which had largely helped to secure the successes of the campaign, and considered himself equally great with, and far more valuable than, any general.

"I am to assure His Highness of Your Majesty's friendship?" Sylvius bowed on a note of interrogation.

"You may give him," said Louis, with a large air of

generosity, "a proof of it—I have ordered that my troops are to spare his lordship of Grave that we have recently taken——"

M. de Louvois broke in through Sir Gabriel's thanks—

"Your Majesty, M. de Groot refuses the protection offered him for his country-house."

"Why, M. le Marquis?" demanded the King haughtily.

The Minister shrugged his shoulders.

"Roman virtue, Sire—he refused to be spared any of the ills falling on his fellow-countrymen."

"M. de Groot," said Louis, "becomes insufferable." He turned again to Sir Gabriel—

"My cousin is at Bodegraven?"

"At Newerbrugge, Your Majesty."

"The English envoys intend to visit him there?"

"I believe so, Sire."

"Well," smiled the King, "we will hope they will be able to arrange matters with His Highness, whom I am impatient to embrace."

"There is not much doubt of it," added M. de Louvois.

The Duke of Monmouth and his companion came forward, talking together.

"Philippe," said Louis rather sharply, "when do you hold the review of your brigade?"

"This evening, Sire," answered M. D'Orleans.

"Sir Gabriel must see it."

The fourth man, who had remained all this time apart, now approached the little group.

"If Your Majesty will give me leave—I am due in Utrecht."

He wore brown velvet touched with gold, and had a noble, careless presence.

Louis answered him with deference—

"I do not presume to give you orders, as you know, M. de Turenne."

The Vicomte bowed.

"M. Vauban requested my attendance."

"Then I must not keep you," answered Louis gracefully;

"but first, this is a messenger from my cousin, the little Prince of Orange."

M. de Turenne fixed his searching eyes on Sir Gabriel, and a faint colour tinged his worn cheeks.

Turenne's mother had come of the House of Nassau ; nearly all his life he had belonged to the Reformed religion ; but he had sacrificed his conscience to his glory, his faith to his fame.

"Am I to have the Prince of Orange on my staff, Sire ?" he asked, with a touch of scorn.

"We hope so, M. le Vicomte," answered Louis suavely.

The great soldier gave his master a curious look.

"So you have tempted him, too," he said. "Your Majesty is irresistible."

"It is you who have made me so," replied the King.

M. de Louvois smiled at this sourly.

"There are some of Your Majesty's triumphs that I have had no hand in," said M. de Turenne.

"Those I must thank M. le Marquis de Louvois for," responded Louis, with his air of fine-mannered greatness.

"Whom will you thank when the Prince of Orange goes to Mass, Sire ?"

"It will be the Prince who will thank me, Monsieur le Vicomte," answered His Majesty.

M. de Turenne spoke, his tone slightly sarcastic—

"You are very fortunate, Sire, to be able to buy everything, even men's faith."

Louis' straight brows rose a little.

"What price," continued M. de Turenne, "will Your Majesty give for this—the conscience of a Calvinist ?"

Louis looked at him straightly—

"That which bought one before," he answered, "my favour."

M. de Louvois stole a malicious glance at M. D'Orleans.

The Vicomte de Turenne bowed, hitched up his baldric, and left the chamber heavily.

The King's face was clouded.

"What is amiss with M. de Turenne ?" he asked haughtily

"He has his moods, Sire," smiled the Minister.

"He says the strangest things," remarked Louis. "Why does he remind me he was once a heretic?"

"It gave Your Majesty the chance to remind him what procured his conversion," answered M. D'Orleans.

Louis pulled out his handkerchief and pressed it to his lips.

"I will take M. de Turenne's moods," he said, "but no one's comments on them."

He rose and turned to Sir Gabriel, who awaited his dismissal.

"I hope to see you at the review this evening, Monsieur. Convey my very good friendship to His Highness."

He held out his fine hand and Sir Gabriel kissed it; then bowed severally to the other gentlemen.

M. de Louvois gave him a curt nod, M. D'Orleans was vacant, and the Englishman came to the door with him.

"You have reason to be satisfied, His Majesty is very well disposed towards you. Commend me to His Highness—I hope we shall both be fighting under the same flag."

"I thank your Grace."

The fair face smiled in an eager, fascinating manner, as if his Grace's one desire was to please Sir Gabriel, but in reality he hardly understood the matter and was wholly indifferent to it, his mind being occupied with a game of tennis he proposed with M. D'Orleans, and his assumed interest being merely his good nature.

Florent gazed at him, then for an instant back at the man wearing green velvet and frizzed hair who was the King of France; he looked at the man beside him, alert, composed, and commonplace, M. de Louvois, feared throughout Europe.

A page in gorgeous livery conducted them through the castle.

Florent, bewildered and disturbed, was further troubled, as they passed along the handsome rooms, by a glimpse through an open door of three people.

Madame Lavalette was one, M. de Pomponne and

Hyacinthe St. Croix the others; St. Croix, looking up, recognised Florent, and nodded in a meaning way.

Van Mander frowned and coloured. When they were clear of the castle, and its dazzle of pomp and soldiery, he turned abruptly to Sir Gabriel—

"What does it mean, Mynheer?"

Gabriel Sylvius answered composedly—

"It means I can tell His Highness not to concern himself about the terms offered to M. de Groot, for His Majesty is entirely friendly and will do more for the Prince than the States could ever do."

"Which is to say, His Highness will change his religion?" said Florent gloomily.

Sir Gabriel smiled.

"We must not commit ourselves as to that, but it is possible that in a little while the theology of Geneva will be extremely unfashionable."

CHAPTER II

THE TEMPTERS

“**M**YNHEER, if you call the position one of absolute despair,” said William Bentinck, “you will not be wrong.”

He spoke to M. Beuningen, late ambassador to England, who was now employed on desperate errands between the States and the Prince.

It was afternoon, warm and cloudy ; the two walked up and down the little garden belonging to the farm where the Captain General had fixed his headquarters. About them lay the encampment. The remnant of the Dutch army, thirteen thousand men, had been gathered here at Newerbrugge to defend the two remaining provinces in concordance with the dauntless policy of the Prince, which was in direct contrast to the consternation, desperation, and submission displayed by the Government.

M. Van Beuningen, accomplished, high-minded, voluble, charming and impetuous, fair, handsome, and finely dressed, was silent awhile, fixing his blue eyes on the distant, sluggish waters of the old Rhine.

M. Bentinck spoke again—

“Louis will be at the Hague in a week.”

“How can you utter such words?” broke out M. Beuningen passionately.

“It is so obvious. Did you hear that Leerdam and Knotsenbourg, Swartenluis, and many smaller places have fallen?”

“I know . . . I know——”

“Well?” M. Bentinck asked.

"I still have hopes."

"In what?"

"In the Prince."

M. Bentinck smiled rather grimly.

"The Prince is another matter—he is not involved in the ruin of the States."

M. Beuningen glanced at him quickly.

"Mynheer," he said in an agitated voice, "you are His Highness' friend—tell me, in God's name, has he a mind to sell us to the French?"

"Why, you speak bluntly."

"The matter is not one for fair phrasing."

M. Bentinck knocked with his cane at the heavy heads of the pinks along the walk.

"I am not free to say anything of the Prince, Mynheer; but I will tell you this, His Highness is in no way bound to the States, who have kept his rights from him and treated him with suspicion and distrust for twenty years."

"You justify his acceptance of overtures from the King of France?"

"I say he is not bound by any law to refuse them."

"By your leave, Mynheer," answered M. Beuningen, "the laws of God forbid a man to sell his country."

"The laws of God," smiled M. Bentinck, "vary according to the interpreter,—and I think, Mynheer, that there will be very little of the United Provinces left for any one to either buy or sell."

M. Beuningen uttered a little sound of desperation. The Prince's friend watched him with some malice, for he had been of the republican party in the days of the glory of John de Witt.

"What is it like at the Hague?" asked M. Bentinck.

They halted by the gate and looked over the neat painted paling towards the camp.

"It is naught but wrath and anguish," answered M. Beuningen with emotion. "M. de Witt hath but recovered from a raging fever to find himself execrated. He hath written a justification

of himself—about the Secret Service money, and the ill supplying of the Army—but who will listen to sober reason?’

“And the peace proposals please no one?”

Coenraad Beuningen replied hotly—

“They are insolent—impossible. When M. de Groot read them to the States, many wept and wrung their hands. . . . They have asked five days in which to consider them.”

He paused a moment, then added—

“The shops are closed, all business suspended. This week they did not print *The Gazette*; the Binnenhof is besieged with angry people—one feeling appears to warm them against the chill of despair, and that is the firmness of the Prince.”

“These things point to a revolution from within even if we escape conquest without.”

“The Prince hath always had the people, and now they believe he can save them——”

“Do they believe,” asked M. Bentinck, “that by making him Stadtholder they will mollify Charles into breaking with Louis?”

“Some may, I do not.”

“Nor I,” admitted M. Bentinck.

“The States,” continued M. Beuningen, “are further divided among themselves. Many are for accepting the terms as they stand—M. Fagel says he would sooner be cut to pieces than subscribe to them. . . . M. Jacob Van der Graef was executed yesterday, the crowd tried to rescue him. He confessed to the attack on M. de Witt and expressed his repentance——”

“And named his accomplices,” commented M. Bentinck.

“Who have escaped——”

“They are in the camp the States say.”

“I know. The States wrote to His Highness requesting that the men be delivered up; the Prince had other business to attend to than making a search for obscure fanatics.”

“What of M. de Montbas?” asked M. Beuningen.

“He was found guilty and banished for fifteen years; the Prince told them to reconsider the sentence——”

“Not finding it severe enough?”

"No."

"That shows His Highness hates a traitor——"

"Or a coward."

The two men fell into silence, their gaze still upon the tents.

Close by the soldiers had built fires between bricks, and in a raised earth-oven were cooking meat. The sun darted a long ray through the clouds and sparkled on the distant Rhine; a white butterfly fluttered up from the garden and flew over the tents.

A horseman rode up, flung the reins to his servant, and dismounted at the farmhouse gate.

It was the Prince.

M. Bentinck and M. Beuningen stood aside.

"Come into the house," said the Captain General abruptly.

When they had followed him into the hall he spoke again.

"The English envoys have arrived—I am to see them now. Mynheer Van Beuningen, you come from the Hague, I will speak with you afterwards."

Leaving the messenger of the States standing under the mirror—the first thing to be found in all Dutch houses (so that the visitor might find his own image before anything)—the Prince turned to the room to the left, followed by William Bentinck.

It was a small chamber of dark wood, plainly furnished; the table covered with dispatches.

The Prince went to the window and opened it. The fever that he had recovered from, as by a miracle, returned at intervals, and had greatly aggravated his asthmatic cough; he was shivering now, though the weather was oppressively hot.

He returned to the table and spoke to Bentinck—

"I have heard from Sir Gabriel."

"Favourable news, Sir?"

"King Louis is resolved to ruin the States, but is wholly friendly to me. M. de Louvois said the English asked too much, and were not in a condition to put forward such terms as his master—so they quarrel already over the plunder."

He coughed, and seated himself at the table. "I have other news," he said in the same even tones, laying his letters down. "Nymwegen has fallen."

"Sir!"

"Yesterday," continued William.

"We have come to a bitter pass!"

"M. Fagel writes there is fierce dissension at the Hague . . . We will see what these English have to say."

"They are in the camp now!"

"Count Struym conducts them here," answered William.

He took off his mantle and leant back in his chair. He looked ill, and coughed continually.

M. Bentinck regarded him curiously. He rather wondered what the Prince was going to say to these English.

The situation was so desperate that any terms offered were almost bound to be accepted, but William Bentinck could not think of the Prince as submitting to either England or France.

Suddenly William broke out—

"Did you hear the terms M. de Groot obtained? Outrageous insolence! Does he think we will be content to be slaves? But they brought it on themselves by sending a crawling embassy of submission."

"Do you imagine the English will be more reasonable, Highness?"

"I think they come to confirm their alliance with France—not to obtain justice for us."

"Will you see them alone, Highness?"

"No—you remain, William."

The Prince spoke in a gasping way, and held his hand to his side.

The room was full of hot air from the camp-fires, and the smell of the cooking. William rose and closed the window again, and as he was returning to his chair the English envoys entered, preceded by Count Struym.

There was a second's pause of curiosity on either side.

William saw two splendidly dressed gentlemen, who carried

themselves with an air of pride and grandeur, both tall, handsome, and decked out in the extreme of fashion.

Their persons he remembered perfectly well. The Earl of Arlington, quiet in manner, of a placid countenance, dark ringlets and moustaches, his carriage fine, but rather stout; richly habited now in black velvet and gold brocade, scarlet feathers in his hat, and wearing a collar of jewels. My lord Buckingham, once "the most beautiful person that ever graced a European Court," but now over florid and heavy, his face suffused and lined, but still with the manner of his youth, and gorgeously attired in white cut velvet, his blonde hair elaborately curled, his blue mantle starred with silver, every detail of his attire sumptuous and costly.

On their part the Englishmen beheld a slight youth of the middle height, with a thin face, an arched nose, curved lips set disdainfully, and deep and powerful eyes, wearing plain armour and top-boots, leather gloves, and a linen cravat.

The envoys swept off their hats and bowed very low; then Buckingham held his beaver against his breast and looked at his companion over the curling feathers.

"I must receive you very simply, my lords," said the Prince in English, as Count Struym withdrew. "I think that we have chairs—though little else."

"I am sorry," answered my lord Arlington, "to meet Your Highness again in this pass."

"And I," said the Duke, seating himself grandly, "am pleased to see Your Highness again under any circumstances."

William gave him a quick look, then addressed himself to the Earl—

"This is my lord Bentinck—he is entirely in my confidence."

The two noblemen bowed. M. Bentinck knew some English, but did not trust himself to speak it.

The Prince seated himself. He still wore his hat, that shaded his pale face and heavy brown hair.

The Duke, filling the room with perfume, splendour, and dazzlement, sat erect, his right hand on his gold cane, the hazy sunlight winking in his jewels.

William glanced keenly from one to the other.

"My lord Halifax?" he questioned.

"Is following, Your Highness—he was too late to accompany us."

Of the three it was Lord Halifax whom William preferred.

"Your Highness," continued Arlington, "we have to put before you the terms of the King, our master."

"And I, my lord, have some reproaches to make on the manner in which His Majesty has forsaken the Triple Alliance."

"It is to satisfy Your Highness on that matter that we are now here——"

The Duke interrupted—

"Shall we to business?"

"If you please, my lord," answered William, not looking at him.

"Your Highness is not too fatigued?" asked Buckingham, who would sooner have gone to his supper first.

"An it please you I will hear you now," replied the Prince.

The Earl was drawing off his gloves.

"You must not confuse the King's action against the States with his feelings towards yourself, Highness," he said.

"Yet I must exclaim against my uncle for this war."

"Sir, I assure you he would never have undertaken it had he not seen your account very clear."

The young General lowered his eyes.

"In the war, my lord?"

"Yes; it was always His Majesty's intention to avenge the ill-treatment of Your Highness by the States," replied Arlington. "And this war may be much to your advantage."

William looked up.

"My lord, I cannot discuss the matter from that standpoint. . . . I speak as the General of the forces of the United Provinces."

Buckingham smiled.

"It is an army almost non-existent, Your Highness," he said.

The Prince slightly flushed.

"My lord, I do not admit that—I am expecting help from Brandenburg and Spain."

"I trust that they will not be needed, Highness," replied Arlington. "Peace, we hope, will render them unnecessary."

"I do hope, my lord, an honourable peace may be come by, but the terms the King of France offers are not to be considered——"

"Yet those in desperate straits can scarce be choosers," answered Buckingham.

"We have not come to desperation, my lord; the Emperor alone is sending me fifteen thousand men."

The Duke shrugged his shoulders.

"Your Highness has heard of the fall of Nymwegen?"

"Yes, my lord," answered William composedly, "but we have not the losses of the campaign under discussion—but the exorbitance of the demands of France."

"The second is the result of the first, Highness—the King of France is in a position to make these demands."

"And we," returned the Prince, "are in a condition to refuse them."

"Your Highness speaks confidently."

"I would not have my words bolder than my actions—I am prepared to stand by what I say."

Buckingham answered—

"Sir, what terms do you object to?"

William fixed his eyes on him.

"My lord, to all of them. . . . M. de Groot offered the King of France Maestricht and the towns on the border, such as Breda, Bergen-op-Zoom, and Hertogenbosch—and in this I think he exceeded his commission."

"His Majesty rejected these terms haughtily," commented Arlington.

The Prince glanced at him gravely.

"The King of France's demands are these—that the frontiers of the Republic be withdrawn to the river Leek, leaving in his hands Guelders, Overysse, Utrecht and

Brabant, Delfzyl and its dependencies, which are, my lords, the keys of Groningen; the free exercise of the Romish faith in the States; the revocation of all edicts detrimental to French commerce; the rights of our East India Company waived in favour of his; a tribute of 12,000,000 florins; and lastly, sir, to complete the humiliation of the States he demands that a formal embassy be sent every year to do homage to him and thank him for having left us so much."

"Well," answered Buckingham, "the terms of a conqueror, Your Highness—and what avails it to complain when there is no alternative?"

Arlington replied more gently—

"We will endeavour, Sir, to soften these terms."

William looked from one to another.

"I think these terms are of M. de Louvois' suggestion—they will prove the worst piece of policy he ever set his hand to. If he had taken M. de Groot's terms he had had a great advantage; but now he will obtain nothing."

The two envoys exchanged a glance.

"Sir," said the Earl, "you confuse yourself with the States—this does not ruin you."

William coughed and drew a painful breath.

"What does my uncle desire of the States?" he asked quietly.

"I have the heads of His Majesty's demands in my mind, Highness," answered Arlington. "Firstly, the right of the flag, and a yearly rent for the herring fisheries, £100,000 a year or less; secondly, the expenses of the war, fixed at £500,000, to be paid in next October; thirdly, three or four towns as hostages—Flushing, Sluys, the Brill, or such."

"The States will never agree to those terms, nor could I in conscience advise them to," answered William firmly.

Arlington was suave.

"They might be moderated——"

Buckingham interrupted—

"Why, by God? . . . Is France to get all and England nothing?"

The Prince bit his lip with the effort to keep back a violent answer.

"My lords," he said in a low voice, "I have no power to treat with you save as General of the States, and with the object to detach you from the French alliance. I do not think it would be to the advantage of England to see the Republic in the hands of France, and it is my aim to separate you from your ally."

Again the envoys looked at each other. Both trained in small dissimulation, neither great enough statesmen to know that candour is often more effective than deception, they regarded this statement as boyish simplicity. It emboldened Arlington to bring out his trump card.

"To return to the terms of France——"

"Sir," interrupted the Prince, "talk no more of them—we would sooner die a thousand deaths than submit to them."

"I will take it upon me," answered the Earl, "to moderate them—so that we find our account in the adjustment; but we must have the cautionary towns."

"I am confident the States—will never give them," returned William.

Buckingham rose suddenly and came to the table.

"There is somewhat else to add," he said, with his air of good-humoured insolence. "You will not lose by this——"

Arlington took it up—

"This in confidence between us: so you cede these terms His Majesty will make you greater than any of your House have been."

"Is that in your instructions?" asked William quietly.

"It is a point His Majesty made with the King of France," answered Arlington eagerly. "If you make this peace, not only will the war be removed from your country, but you will be made Sovereign of it, and both the Kings will secure you, at home and abroad. For their Majesties agree to make this a condition of peace with the States, that they take you for King over such of the Low Countries as be left after we have had our partage."

William kept his eyes lowered, and leant a little sideways over the arm of the chair.

"Ye were to make this proposal to me?" he asked.

My lord Buckingham put the matter more bluntly.

"We are to offer you the hereditary sovereignty of the United Provinces, Sir, if you will give up to the King of England the towns he demands from the States, forbear to contest the conquests of the French, and place in King Louis' hands those remaining towns he has not yet taken."

For the first time since the interview William looked at Bentinck, who stood motionless by the window.

"Sir," said my lord Arlington, "do you hesitate?—you will be a sovereign Prince."

"I like better," replied William, "the condition I am in of Captain General of the United Provinces."

"It is to your interest," said Buckingham strongly, "to take this offer."

William gave him a proud look.

"Maybe, sir," he replied; "but I believe myself in honour, and in conscience, bound not to prefer my interest before my obligation."

My lord laughed, half wearily.

"Honour and conscience!" he repeated; "it is strange diplomacy that quotes them."

"They are things," answered the Prince, "that I have some regard for——"

My lord Arlington interposed—

"I think you are ambitious. This offer may well rouse your hopes of glory—Louis' ranks offer many chances—you will be protected by the two most powerful kings in the world."

William put his hand to his forehead.

"Did you come to bait me with these prospects, my lords, or to treat for an honourable peace?"

"This is a peace wholly advantageous——"

"To me, my lord; not to the States."

Buckingham was contemptuous.

"The States! do they any longer exist?—a handful of traders—always opposed to Your Highness."

"I must not remember that now, sir, for I am entrusted with their sole defences."

"Why, the better for you—since you have your revenge put into your hand."

The Prince narrowed his eyes on him.

"I am Dutch, my lord."

Buckingham accepted the rebuke with a shrug.

"You are King Louis' cousin, Highness, and King Charles' nephew."

"But I am neither Stewart nor Bourbon, my lord, but of my father's House."

The envoys were silent a while. They had bartered away their own honour so long ago that they had forgotten they had ever had any. They were clever at overcoming scruples, but a firm attitude of cold honesty bewildered them both; it roused, too, my lord Buckingham's sneers. He let his glance run with a galling look of mockery over the young man who presumed to have a conscience.

"If you refuse these offers what other course have you open to you?" he asked. "In whom will you trust?"

William looked at him straightly—

"In God."

"God!" echoed my lord, with a jesting accent of sarcasm.

The Prince flushed.

"He is not dead because ye have forgotten Him at Whitehall, my lord."

"I perceive that Your Highness is a fanatic," sneered Buckingham.

"I am a Calvinist," returned the Prince; "and I take such comfort in my faith that no mocks can touch me."

The Duke smiled at Arlington.

"What have we here?" he asked. "This would sound like Tom o' Bedlam in London. If Your Highness is to talk like a country parson, I am silenced."

The Earl spoke—

"I must entreat Your Highness to consult your advisers on what we have said—this matter may not be decided easily."

William rose and held on to the back of his chair.

"It may be decided in a breath, my lord." He addressed himself to Arlington, and had his back half turned to the Duke. "But the terms of peace—I will appeal to you to consider those. In the name of wisdom, of generosity, of policy, my lord, offer us terms we can with honour accept."

Arlington rose.

"Sir, if you prove not tractable in this matter we must go to the French, and I have small hopes of concessions from them."

"I beseech you to try your best, my lord."

"I shall always be mindful of Your Highness' interests."

"If Your Highness is mindful of them yourself," added Buckingham.

William took no heed of him.

"My lord," he continued to Arlington, "I should wish you to see some of the States; M. Beuningen is with me—we will approach this matter after supper."

"Highness," answered the Earl, "I would warn you—at the present juncture—to make no mention to the States of the offer of the sovereignty of the Provinces."

"I will make no promise," said William, who, being jealous of his word, was always loath to bind himself. "I must say what I think fit, my lord."

"It is for your own good we give the caution," advised Buckingham arrogantly.

Again the Prince ignored him.

"Count Struym has found accommodation for you, my lord," he told Arlington. "I will see you at supper. . . . It were better, perhaps, we considered privately before we said anything further in this matter."

The English deputies departed, leaving the Prince very pale, very composed, standing by his chair in the modest room, and William Bentinck silent against the window-frame.

"Here's a proud piece," said Buckingham, as he flaunted

out into the twilight. "Here's a to do over a few miles of marsh!"

He was, in truth, deeply mortified by the Prince's cold reception.

"Wait until he has seen his advisers—he will subscribe to our proposals yet," answered Arlington, himself disappointed. "What prince of one-and-twenty ever preferred his country to his interests?—besides——"

"Besides he hath no alternative," added Buckingham, "and must know it. This is but playing with us to enhance his own value. Wait till to-night, my lord, you will see me prove myself a pretty politician."

CHAPTER III

THE ANSWER

WILLIAM BENTINCK, carrying a candle, went up the narrow, polished stairs to the Prince's apartment.

It was between four and five of the morning, within the house still quite dark and silent at last.

The conference with the English commissioners had been opened again after supper and continued till long past midnight.

M. Van Beuningen had talked on the folly of the Anglo-French Alliance, adorning his speech with scriptural quotations, illustrations drawn from his vast learning, and a copiousness of logic, until Arlington had grown restive and Buckingham blasphemous.

But his arguments were not without effect. The Duke, who had drunk heavily, swore at last he was in the right, and had almost offered to sign a treaty with the States when my lord Arlington, who was a moderate man at table, restrained him.

M. Beverningh, who had taken at least enough wine for volubility, declaimed loudly against the injustice of the demands made by Charles and Louis. Buckingham became noisy, offending the Prince with his swearing and profanity, and refused to abate his terms, repeating that France should not have everything and England nothing.

Arlington, grave, good-natured, but weak and unscrupulous, was more reasonable. He promised, though not very confidently, to endeavour to moderate Louis' preposterous demands; he insisted, however, on the cautionary towns, as he termed them, for Charles.

On this point the Dutch deputies were firm: they would not place an inch of their territory in the hands of France or England, beyond the border towns, such as Maestricht, with which William had already asked the Allies to content themselves.

Buckingham, speaking violently, argued that it was absurd to offer a king a few towns in exchange for three provinces he had already conquered, and three more that he was prepared to conquer; and hinted that the Dutch were in no condition to argue about terms at all, but must take thankfully what was given them—and this in face of it that a while before he had been offering to sign an alliance with them.

So, veering and unstable, he embarrassed the discussion with constant changes of opinion and capricious arguments based upon neither justice nor reason.

For his part, the Prince appealed to England's ancient friendship, to the principles of the Triple Alliance, to his uncle's protestations, to the unwisdom of allowing the French to upset the balance of power in Europe, and to the one religion common to England and the United Provinces, threatened by the encroachments of Louis.

But this policy was too far-seeing, too slow, and too lofty to appeal to men eager for immediate gain and applause, indifferent to their country's ultimate good, only vaguely concerned even for her present glory, and absorbed purely in their own selfish interests, that lay entirely with France.

Arranging for another private interview with the Prince in the morning, the commissioners and the deputies separated. After hours of talk, nothing had been conceded one side or the other, the English refusing to abate their terms and the Dutch resolved not to accept them.

William Bentinck, who had listened eagerly, but said very little, had decided privately that the Prince could and must do no other than come separately to terms with the envoys, on the basis of a secret arrangement such as they had themselves offered and urged.

Excited, and unable to sleep on the hard settle that was his

only bed (since an English gentleman had his room), Bentinck determined to consult with the Prince. William had desired to be roused early, to allow himself time before his final interview with the English commissioners.

But Bentinck discovered that he had not been to bed at all, but was sitting fully dressed by the open window.

"Ah, you," he said affectionately. "I am glad to see you."

M. Bentinck placed the candle beside the one already on the mantelshelf.

"And I am sorry you have not been asleep, Sir."

"Have you?" smiled the Prince.

"No—but it was not my fault."

"Whose then?"

"The hardness and narrowness of the settle, Highness, which was as unyielding as the English demands."

The Prince rose.

"You had been welcome to mine. Bentinck, I could not sleep to-night."

"The arguments of M. Buckingham and M. Beuningen buzz too much in your ears?"

"M. Beuningen is an immoderate talker," answered William.

"I think he spoke too long to-night."

"M. Buckingham thought so too."

"Oh, he!" said the Prince impatiently; "half the time he was not sober."

"None the easier to deal with for that."

"M. Beverningh, also," added William, with an air of disgust, "hath the vice of drinking too much."

M. Bentinck smiled.

"It makes him eloquent."

The Prince stood at the window in a weary attitude.

"What hour is it?"

"Not yet five, Highness."

William spoke abruptly.

"Bentinck—they are going to repeat their offer to me."

His friend looked at him.

"I think so, Highness."

"They advised me to consult some one that I had trust in."

"You have spoken to M. Beuningen? My faith!" exclaimed M. Bentinck, "there is little to consult about."

For a moment William was silent; then he said, looking out of the window—

"M. Fagel writes to me that I alone keep the people from despair. . . . My name, Bentinck."

"They begin to repent their ingratitude, Highness."

"The country is without a head since the illness of M. de Witt . . . if they should turn to me——"

"I think they may——"

"—and offer me the Stadtholdership——"

"Now that it is worthless."

"Not worthless," said William.

"At least not what the French and English can offer you."

The Prince gave him a strange, almost a wistful, glance.

"Oh, this is a little age," he said wearily. "Of such little men . . . I . . . but, no . . ."

He turned his gaze over his camp, spread beneath the gold and silver dawn.

"Perhaps some men could have done better," he said. "I would I could have served one campaign *under* Condé before I had to serve against him . . . yet against all odds something may be accomplished."

M. Bentinck stared at him.

"You do not seriously think of resistance, Highness?"

"Would you consider it madness?" asked William.

"The most utter madness!"

M. Bentinck was vehement.

"The country is lost—half conquered, wholly despaired of. Nothing will soften King Louis' demands—you must see it."

William turned towards the room and seated himself in the chintz-cushioned chair by the yellow-glazed hearth.

"And if I pitted myself against Louis?" he queried.

"It would be——"

"As if a child should set itself to stem a river with its unaided hands?" finished William grimly.

M. Bentinck shrugged his shoulders——

"It would be an impossibility——there is no one in Europe to stand against Louis——"

"One might arise."

"England is his ally——the Empire afraid——the rest of Europe overawed——"

"One might rouse them."

"It would be a task——well, I call it impossible."

William coughed, and fixed his bright eyes on the empty hearth.

"You are weary," said Bentinck tenderly, coming nearer.

"I am very weary and sick to-night," answered the Prince faintly; "in body and soul, William, I can get no rest. At times——despair cannot be always held at bay——my head hath a horrible inclination to ache, and I think I have the fever still. Yet, it will pass; I pray you do not notice me."

"Console yourself, Sir, that your prospects are more hopeful than for some time."

The Prince made no answer, and M. Bentinck regarded him anxiously.

"I would have you consider well what you say to these envoys," he added earnestly. "Your terms will never be listened to . . . Louis is a conqueror. . . . By making yourself King of Holland, you save it, and revenge yourself on the republicans."

"I have considered that," answered the Prince.

"Well," returned M. Bentinck, "you have always been reserved, even with me, Highness, and you take advice of no man . . . but I make bold to tell you that only a foolish mind would refuse these offers the French and English make you."

Again William was silent. His attitude was one of utter exhaustion; he continually coughed and shivered.

"You cannot stand the occupation of war," said William

Bentinck. "If you would not kill yourself you must make peace, Highness."

The Prince roused himself and sat up.

"Will you wait on the English, Bentinck, presently, and tell them I will receive them here as soon as they wish?"

M. Bentinck understood his dismissal in this and felt offended.

Once more he proved the uselessness of any attempt on his part to offer advice to his master.

He put out the needless candles, for the small room was filled with the glitter of the sun, and left without further speech.

William sat quite still, gazing at the homely tiles with their little rural scenes in blue on a yellow ground—a cow, a milkmaid, a windmill, a barge, a dog, a man and a woman skating.

The languor of fatigue and pain made him sit heavily and droopingly, his head supported in his right hand.

The childhood he had scarcely left behind rose in his memory, one incident after another, back to the early years when his mother had taught him he was of the proudest blood in the world . . .

He looked back on the loneliness, the dreariness; the rankling and constant sense of humiliation; the illnesses; the hunts in Guelders; the bitterness of having to part with M. de Zuylestein; the espionage of the republicans; the lofty governorship of M. de Witt; the perpetual feeling of injustice and restraint, the agony of having to take quietly treatment his imperious nature longed to spurn; the overtures from M. de Pomponne, first insinuating to him that he could revenge himself by leaguings with Louis; the visits of Sir William Temple, so different from the others, treating him with homage as a grandchild of England; the long hours of arduous study, followed by blinding headaches; the quiet Sundays with the lengthy sermons in the Groote Kerk,—all his training teaching him to be reserved, self-reliant, cautious, and to conceal his quick passions under an unreadable exterior.

He had never been happy, often utterly dreary, dispirited,

and sad. . . . He remembered his recent entry into Middelburg as the fairest episode; for the rest he shuddered at the recollection of the slights, rebuffs, reprimands, loneliness, disputes, illnesses and neglects that made up the sum of his life.

With a little, broken sigh he moved at last and slowly rose.

His cuirass and his sword lay on the ground beside his bed. He picked up the weapon, buckled it on and went languidly downstairs.

The small farm was full of young Dutch noblemen, and the English forming the train of the envoys.

Avoiding these, he entered the little front room where the previous day he had received the commissioners.

Half an hour later M. Beuningen found him there, breakfasting alone on brown bread, radishes, and cock ale, and making notes on a slip of paper.

"Highness——" began Coenraad Beuningen.

William looked up gravely—

"Ah, have you had breakfast, Mynheer?"

"Not yet."

"Well, will you share mine?" the Prince drew forward a chair.

M. Beuningen seated himself, murmuring thanks.

He looked agitated and overwrought; his handsome eyes were red, his dress dishevelled.

The Prince folded up his paper and placed it in his pocket. He had changed his suit, and wore a prune-coloured velvet, very plain, and a black sash.

"I have made some notes on the converse of last night," he remarked.

M. Beuningen poured out the ale from the silver jug.

"Your Highness has to see the envoys again?" he inquired in a humble way.

"This morning, yes," answered William; "before they leave for Zeyst."

He leant back and looked full at his companion, with a penetrating and almost smiling glance.

M. Beuningen set his tankard down.

"We have gained little good by this conference," he said distractedly.

William was silent.

M. Beuningen crumbled his bread on the table.

"Your Highness," he said desperately, "I have been thinking . . . all night . . . this wretched country. . . . O God! my country . . ."

A light flashed into William's eyes, but still he said nothing.

M. Beuningen pushed back his chair. He could hardly control his features and his voice.

"I must appeal to Your Highness—in the name of the States," he said thickly, "for we have no hope but in you . . ."

"What do you mean, my lord?" asked William softly.

Coenraad Beuningen rose.

"I think these men have made private overtures to Your Highness," he answered, "and you are free to take them . . . but . . . have pity on the country." He clasped his hand passionately over his heart. "To such wretched straits are we reduced. . . . Ah, they tempted your ambition I doubt not, but if Your Highness would be truly great, save the United Provinces."

"Do you believe I could?" asked the Prince breathlessly.

"Before God I believe Your Highness could."

An extraordinary change came over the Prince's face; he replied with vivacity—

"M. Van Beuningen, you have been a good republican—I will forgive it you for that."

"I have been opposed to Your Highness," said M. Beuningen, "but the time of party is over—I can see only that the country is conquered, ruined . . . and that our one hope is in the courage and firmness of Your Highness."

He went restlessly to the window and put his hand before his eyes.

William gazed at him, still with that expression of animation and pleasure.

"You must not despair, Mynheer," he said gently; "too many despair."

"I shall not—if Your Highness does not forsake us."

The Prince rose.

"What of your former rulers?" he asked.

"They can do nothing with the people. M. de Witt is ill—loathed."

"Mynheer," answered William, "the States dealt hardly with me—I have been virtually a prisoner all my life—it is strange they should come to me now."

"It may be, but Your Highness' voice is the only one that can make itself heard," said M. Beuningen in a tone of despair. "The people will turn to you. . . . If in vain . . . God have mercy upon us."

"You credit me with great powers. . . . Do I not hear it said that the man who pits himself against France must be mad?"

Coenraad Beuningen looked round sharply—

"Or a hero," he said.

"They are rarer than madmen," answered the Prince.

"Your Highness' House has been rich in great men."

William drew back from the suspicion of flattery.

"Leave them, Mynheer," he said coldly, and picked up a copy of *The Gazette* that lay on the table.

M. Beuningen turned away, his hands clasped behind his back.

William regarded him covertly and keenly.

"Mynheer," he said in another tone.

M. Beuningen raised his head, there were tears in his eyes.

Before he could speak M. Heenvliet announced the English envoys, who were accompanied by M. Bentinck.

Coenraad Beuningen gave the Prince a quick look, bowed to the company and left the chamber.

William remained where he was, standing by the breakfast-table, his hand resting on the rail of M. Beuningen's chair.

The Duke, over-dressed and flamboyant, trailing a purple velvet mantle over one shoulder and carrying his hat with

long rose-coloured feathers, seated himself without ado ; but Arlington, more respectful, remained on his feet.

"I trust the night has brought wisdom to Your Highness," said Buckingham, swinging his embroidered gloves by the tassels.

"I can only repeat the proposals I made yesterday," replied the Prince. "My influence with the States permits me to promise their execution. As to what you propose, my lords, the States will never accede to such terms, nor could I advise them to."

Arlington answered with great earnestness. The success of his mission lay with this attempt to gain the Prince—

"Sir, forget the States awhile," he said. "We speak to you—as a Prince of our Royal House—to show the consideration and friendship of His Majesty. . . . Sir, you must believe that we are sincere. . . . Cromwell made your exclusion from power a condition of peace with the United Provinces . . . King Charles will make your restoration a condition—yea, restoration to a greater position than ever your ancestors possessed."

William seated himself and looked on the ground.

The Earl continued, in his smooth, pleasant voice—

"These burghers have behaved insolently to you, Your Highness. It hath always been His Majesty's intention to make them repent their ingratitude to your House. He now proves his entire friendship by this offer—which is, we repeat, the sovereignty of Holland and other lands, in return for your alliance with His Majesty, the cautionary towns, and the delivery of the remaining forts into the hands of His Majesty of France."

The Prince glanced up.

"My lord, you had my answer last night."

"I trust Your Highness has considered since then."

"Reflect," added Buckingham, "that resistance is useless—by God! you must see it."

"I see," returned the Prince, "that you propose to me an infamous thing."

Arlington slightly coloured, but the Duke laughed.

"Your Highness is very young," said the Earl. "M. de Witt has filled your head with fantastic notions."

"M. de Witt is an honest man," replied William, "and a wise one—I learnt no folly from him."

"I do not understand Your Highness' attitude," urged Arlington. "Our agents and those of M. de Pomponne assured you some time since——"

William interrupted.

"My lord, the French have made advances to me very often—they have always been rejected. I would not owe my elevation in the State to foreign intervention, but to the will of God and the wish of the people."

Arlington was nonplussed.

"Your Highness has not learnt the language of diplomacy," he said.

"Your lordship must lay that to the charge of my inexperience—I am new to affairs," answered the Prince proudly. "Maybe I speak too bluntly—but the meaning is the main thing, is it not, my lord?"

Buckingham spoke now.

"Consider well your meaning before you utter it, Highness—think of the alternative. The terms that you propose we should not dare put before M. de Louvois, I tell you plainly; and there is nothing before you but a continuation of the war—that is, a continuation of the conquest of the Republic—if you refuse us. You and the States go to ruin together, for there is no help for you."

M. Bentinck came anxiously forward.

William looked straight at the Duke.

"Nevertheless I refuse your offer, my lord."

Buckingham rose impatiently.

"You do not know what you say. Have you no ambition?—We offer you dominion—power."

William rose; for the first time some agitation showed through the composure of his manner.

"You offer me what I would not stoop to pick up, my lord," he answered.

"I thought you a Prince desirous of reigning," said Arlington.

"Not at the price of my honour, sir."

Buckingham struck his gloves across his open palm.

"Whatever you do the country is lost," he sneered.

"If it be I will not connive at it," replied the Prince.

"Nor make my profit out of that misfortune."

The Duke was contemptuous.

"Your Highness dreams of resistance—a second Hannibal!"

William coloured and breathed deeply.

"I do think I might do even as he did."

"Press not the parallel too close, Highness. This is our second Punic war, and in a week or so M. de Louvois may say—'Delenda est Carthago.'"

"Rome fell also," returned William, "and in a less noble fashion by her own corruption. Go carefully, my lord, that the like fate comes not on England."

Buckingham affected to laugh.

"We get no nearer the matter."

"I must ask for Your Highness' final decision," added Arlington.

William stood with his back against the table, looking from one to the other with slightly narrowed eyes.

"My lords, for what concerns me privately you have had my answer; for what concerns Their High Mightinesses—you must go to the States."

William Bentinck murmured impatiently—

"I would as lief that a dozen of the States were hanged, so that the war was taken out of the country and Your Highness king of it."

"Is that your final decision?" asked Arlington, deeply mortified.

"Yes," replied the Prince firmly; "and nothing will move me, my lord."

So curt, unfaltering, and stern were his words that the envoys saw no hope of persuading him. They prepared to leave; but Buckingham was too angry to go in silence.

"If you do not put yourself wholly in the King's hands you are lost," he declared. "If you have any wisdom you will consider——"

The Prince cut him short—

"My countrymen," he said, "have trusted me, and I will never deceive nor betray them for any base ends of my own."

Buckingham, his hand on the door, answered hotly—

"Think no more of your country, for it no longer exists—do you not see that it is lost? If it survive this campaign it will be a miracle—do you not see that it is lost? There is nothing before you but despair; you must see your country conquered." And again he repeated, "Do you not see that it is lost?"

William's calm changed into a passionate emotion.

He answered with an air of exaltation; he was so lifted up, he cared little for any of them—

"My lord, I indeed see that the country is in great danger; but there is one way never to see it lost—and that is to die in the last ditch."

There was a little pause. Arlington glanced at Buckingham, and after a second the Duke answered—

"Very well, Sir, in a short while you will regret this. . . . I am sorry you are so intractable."

"We shall have a different reception at Zeyst," added the Earl. "I must warn Your Highness that we shall there conclude a closer union between England and France."

"The rearrangement of the terms is between you and the States," replied the Prince. "As to what touches me—I have answered."

He moved away towards the hearth, averting his face from them.

The envoys bowed coldly and withdrew, both angry, and Buckingham, at least, his enemy.

William Bentinck stared at the door that had closed after them.

"They have gone, Highness!" he exclaimed, "and in wrath—you have destroyed your last hope."

"They are shallow men," returned William calmly.

He came back to the table, coughing a little.

Bentinck appeared alarmed and troubled.

"You were ill advised!—What have you done?" he cried.
"What is to become of us all?"

"This is not the language of a friend," returned the Prince, who seemed little to heed the other's exclamations.

"The States may accept the terms," said M. Bentinck, catching at straws.

"Not if I can prevent them."

William Bentinck answered angrily—

"Sir, you throw away your own advantage wilfully! M. de Buckingham was right—there is nothing but despair before all of us."

The Prince sat immovable, composed, with an absent look in his eyes, gazing out of the window at the camp.

M. Bentinck, exasperated, went violently from the room.

William glanced round as the door banged, then sat still, taking his aching head in his hand.

There was a thoughtful, absorbed expression on his pale face, a relaxing of the usual disdainful curve of his lips that gave him an air of gentleness.

He was not long alone.

Count Struym and M. Heenvliet entered with more eagerness than ceremony.

"Sir," said the first gentleman, "here are two burgomasters, two burgher captains, and others, come from Dordt——"

"Dordt?" repeated the Prince; this town, the residence of the de Witts, had always been considered particularly republican.

"Dordt, Highness—they desire to see you immediately."

"Why? For what reason?"

"Sir, they are confused with haste and agitation, but I gather the town is in such a tumult none save Your Highness can quell it—and to save their own lives the magistrates have sent for Your Highness."

William answered rather impatiently—

"It is impossible for me to journey to Dordt.

"They will not return without you."

"I must remain at my post."

"Sir, they are afraid of being torn to bits if they disappoint the people——"

"Ah," said William sharply, "is it as serious as that?"

"I think it is the signal for a restoration, Highness."

The Prince rose.

"Is it more than a riot?"

"I think so, Sir."

"They want me—the people want me?"

"The burgomasters say so. It seems they were fired by the example of Ter Veere—which has proclaimed Your Highness Stadtholder with much enthusiasm."

William flushed.

"But Ter Veere is my own lordship."

"You will at least see this deputation from Dordt, sir?"

"Yes—I will see them."

He had reassumed now his usual composure and reserve; he gave no sign that he was moved, yet it was a triumph. Dordt, the home of the de Witts, had risen in his favour——

"Bring the burghers here, Count," he said.

CHAPTER IV

THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE

IN the frantic state of angry despair to which the United Provinces were reduced, Holland, the proudest, wealthiest State, was the first to take fire at the injuries inflicted on her, and to turn fiercely on the Government that she conceived had betrayed her into ruin.

The mission of M. de Groot had been vastly unpopular. The submission shown in this embassy was looked upon as a sign of degrading, nay, criminal weakness, and the people violently accused their Ministers of selling them to the French.

They reminded each other that Rhynsberg had not had enough powder to defend the counterscarps; that all the saltpetre belonging to the East India Company had been allowed to be sold to the French, even when war appeared inevitable; that the land forces had been greatly reduced of late, that such soldiers as they had were ill-trained and ill-paid; that tedious difficulties had been put in the way of the election of the Prince of Orange to the Captain Generalship, and even now his power was so restricted as to be almost useless.

They flattered themselves that the King of France would not have had such easy success but for complicity on the part of the governors of the country, and all overtures of peace were regarded as a final attempt to deliver them to the enemy.

The idea of peace became one with slavery and disgrace, and the Government was regarded as vile and infamous in even listening to Louis' terms; and on John de Witt, the head of the Government and the apostle of peace, all rage and hate

were poured. All the disasters of the war were imputed to his charge; he was accused of every crime frenzy could find a name for, and blamed bitterly for having so long kept the Prince out of power and for having clipped such authority as he had been obliged to give him.

On the other hand, the idea of war and resistance was associated with the image of the young Captain General, austere, composed, religious, of the old House, the only man who had dared to show firmness in the face of the overwhelming public misfortunes. He became the idol of the people, who ran frantic in his name.

At Dordt they had broken into open revolt. On hearing of the terms offered by France, and that the States were considering them, and a rumour being abroad that their representatives had advocated peace, a company of burghers marched to the town hall and demanded of the councillors if they were prepared to defend the town, or if they already negotiated its delivery into the hands of the enemy?

The magistrates replied that they would resist to the utmost, but did not succeed in pacifying the citizens, who, suspecting their republican sympathies, demanded permission to inspect the arsenals.

The keeper was absent, the keys with him. This gave the signal for a cry of treason that was echoed throughout the town, and the subsequent opening of the magazines did not suffice to restore order.

Angry cries were started against John de Witt and his followers; the Orange flag was paraded through the streets with shouts for the Prince of Orange, the white flag flying contemptuously beneath William's colour.

The magistrates assembled in agitation, but no concession would quiet the people. The burgomaster, not daring to act without authority from the Government, endeavoured to escape from the town, but was stopped in a side street by a workman armed with a hatchet, who offered to brain him if he resisted the wishes of the populace.

In this fashion conducted back to the town hall, the burgo-

master was forced to again summon the councillors to consult on the situation.

It was an ugly one for them. They had sworn to maintain the Perpetual Edict, and would have to answer to the States General if they violated their oath. On the other hand, they were in immediate danger from the violence of the people.

They discovered, as they thought, an expedient to shift the responsibility, and announced, with sound of trumpets, that they would at once send a deputation to the Prince, begging him to come immediately to Dordt.

The town secretary, Orent Muys, two members of the council, two burgomasters, two burgher captains, and two citizens were chosen, and escorted to the gates by the people, shouting—

"Long live His Highness!"

"Death to the bad magistrates!"

"Down with John de Witt!"

"To hell with the friends of France!"

All night long the town seethed. The magistrates trembled when they considered what the outburst of fury would be should the deputation return, the Prince not with them.

As soon as it was light the people were out on the quays, gazing down the flat, grey waters of the Maas and the Merwede, which stretched almost to the horizon where Rotterdam lay, and spread to right and left encircling the town in a belt of water.

The burgher companies were up and armed, patrolling the streets, clattering their blunderbusses under the windows of Cornelius de Witt's house, where the Ruard lay sick, and shouting in insulting tones for the Prince, so that he could hear them in his bed.

Others amused themselves with breaking into the town hall, destroying the remaining portraits of John and Cornelius de Witt, and savagely tearing out of its frame Baan's picture of the Victory at Chatham, which was dedicated to the glory of the Ruard.

About ten o'clock the feeling rose to frenzy; it became

known that the deputation had returned in company with the young Prince.

The magistrates hastened to receive William, who was landing at the Groothoofd Poort, one of the finest gates of the wealthy city, situate on the junction of the Merwede and the Maas.

The inhabitants formed themselves into a guard of honour, and the Prince was greeted by a shout of pure wild joy.

The councillors, including among them Jacob de Beveren, the brother-in-law of the Grand Pensionary, greeted him humbly, even kissing his hand.

One offered him a coach.

William declined, and to the great satisfaction of the people walked among them on foot to the town hall.

He was plainly dressed, without armour, wore only a light sword and carried a cane.

He kept his hat on, and took no notice in his solemn entry of the people or of the councillors who accompanied him.

The distance was not great between the Groothoofd Poort and the Stadhuis, but William, as he walked slowly down the Wynstraat, had time to observe both that he could do what he pleased with the people and that the magistrates intended to thrust on him all responsibility.

They followed him with heads uncovered, but they made no suggestion.

The enormous crowd gathered as they advanced through the Groenmarkt, and considerably impeded their progress to the fine Gothic Stadhuis. The canals were choked with boats laden with armed citizens, and people came crowding up from the ship-building yards, from the barges and timber-yards, till the streets could hold no more.

On the Stadhuis steps William paused.

"Mynheer Hallingh," he said to the burgomaster, "I acknowledge my reception—but what object do I serve by entering your town hall?"

The burgomaster bowed very low, for the eyes of thousands were on him.

"We hope Your Highness may do us the extreme favour of taking a seat in our council."

"To what end, Mynheer?" asked William steadily.

M. Beveren answered, with his eye on the expectant crowd—

"Has Your Highness any proposal to make us?"

The Prince saw clearly by this that they hoped to delude the people by an outward show of deference, managing that the Prince should return without any further concession to their revolutionary wishes.

On William's part it was not his desire to put himself at the head of a mob, and neither his nature nor his policy to encourage sedition. He was as prudent as the councillors, and as resolute not to commit himself to their intention that if there must be a revolution it should be laid to him.

At the same time he was angry that they should send for him merely to fool the people of Dordt.

He answered with composure—

"Mynheer, I must remind you that I came here at your request—your urgent request—to hear what you had to say to me."

The councillors refused to be drawn; with many protestations of respect they invited him to inspect the arsenals and fortifications of the town.

William looked at them, at M. Bentinck, at the crowd, and he smiled.

He could not help being amused at the cunning with which these republican magistrates were endeavouring to keep the law and please the people.

"Very well, Mynheer," he answered gravely. "I shall be pleased to see your fortifications."

Followed by the eager crowds, the Prince set out for the ramparts and the powder magazines.

M. Beveren, the husband of John de Witt's sister, galled by the position in which he found himself, ventured to put on his hat.

It was instantly knocked off, with threats that it would be

his head next time if he did not treat the Prince with proper respect.

William affected neither to see nor hear. He conversed with M. Bentinck, and occasionally with the burgomaster, his manner showing the same calm as if no mob clamoured at their heels. He passed interested comments on the beautiful architecture of the wealthy town that he had never seen before.

Outside the Latin Grammar School, where John de Witt had studied the history of his country with a joyous and ambitious heart, and not far from the house of Jacob de Witt, where the Grand Pensionary, in the days when he wore a sword and love-locks, had written French verses to Wendela Van Bicker, the people closed round the Prince and his escort and demanded that he should not leave the town until the magistrates had proclaimed him.

M. Van Beveren murmured something about the Perpetual Edict, upon which one, Henry Dibbets, a Calvinist minister, levelled a gun at his head and shouted to the Prince that he would soon have his father's offices restored to him.

The Prince himself put the musket aside.

"My friends, I am content," he said gravely.

The burgomaster, thrust up against the wall of the school, shouted lustily—

"Long live the Prince!"

But the magistrates, still resolved not to yield, hastily invited William to a repast at the Peacock Inn.

"In truth," said the Prince, regarding them with smiling eyes, "I am a little fatigued."

The angry crowd demanded if he had been proclaimed Stadtholder.

"Thou old, fat villain!" cried Henry Dibbets to the burgomaster. "Thou art deceiving us! Hast thou brought the Prince here to walk him up and down the town?"

He was seconded by furious cries of—

"Knipperdolling!"

"Traitor!"

"Down with the MM. de Witt!"

They swarmed after the Prince to the Peacock Inn, where the frightened landlord, overwhelmed at the honour, prostrated himself before His Highness.

In the fine dining-room on the ground floor a meal was hastily but sumptuously prepared.

William, still wearing his hat, took the head of the table.

The magistrates, white and flustered, seated themselves, giving anxious glances towards the door and the long windows that overlooked the street.

"Your citizens," said William to the burgomaster, "seem to be of a noisy disposition."

It was his first allusion to the nature of his reception.

"They are very fond of Your Highness," answered Van Hallingh fatuously.

"Ah?" The Prince spoke dryly. "It seems as if they might be dangerous, Mynheer, to any they were *not* fond of."

And he gave the councillors a sarcastic look.

The magistrates winced; they became every moment more uncomfortable. They had only inflamed the popular feeling by sending for the Prince, who they now perceived was too wise to commit himself by any illegal act; nor were they at all reassured by the shouts and tumults without and the excited faces at door and window.

In truth the landlord had had orders to lay the repast at the back, but that personage could not bear to serve His Highness in the worst parlour, which was not, he declared, large enough nor fine enough for so distinguished a company. In defiance of his orders he had arranged the dinner in the great oak chamber, with its shelves of brass and pottery, its fine pictures, its handsome clock, Indian carpet, and tortoiseshell mirrors that were the pride of his heart.

It was a fine dinner, including such delicacies as spinach tart, stuffed heron, jellied venison, the famous sweet cakes from Deventer, ale thickened with honey, and a variety of gorgeous puddings; but the councillors at least did not enjoy it, even the splendid wines could not raise their spirits.

The Prince, who saw fairly clearly the end of the comedy, and could not but enjoy the discomfiture of his enemies, was composed and gracious.

He commended the fare and praised the wealthy appearance of the prosperous town, but his words could hardly be heard for the clamour in the streets.

"Our friends without make converse difficult," he remarked.

M. Bentinck laughed. The prospect of the present triumph had driven his disappointment at the Prince's cold dismissal of the English envoys into the background of his thoughts. He was young enough to carry himself haughtily, and kept one hand on his sword-hilt and another on his yellow moustaches, with a fine martial swagger.

Towards the end of the repast the crowd drove back the burgher captains stationed on guard at the door.

M. Van Beveren could contain himself no longer. He sprang to his feet.

"For God's sake, Your Highness——!"

The Prince glanced at him sideways.

"What is the matter, Mynheer?"

The burgomaster rose also.

"Sir," he cried in agitation.

"Well?" asked William calmly, setting down his glittering tankard.

"Your Highness—these people——"

"They show an inclination to enter, do they not, Mynheer?"

"Cannot Your Highness speak to them?" implored M. Beveren.

William smiled coldly.

"I have no authority, Mynheer, the burgomaster——"

"They will listen to no one but you, Your Highness."

"Not even to their own magistrates, Mynheer?" inquired William maliciously.

Meanwhile the people were pressing into the hall of the inn, uttering shouts and threats.

"You do not seem very popular," said the Prince dryly, surveying the unhappy councillors.

"Death to the friends of France!"

"Down with de Witt!"

"Down with the Ruard of Putten!"

The magistrates all rose to their feet.

"Do not spoil your dinners, Mynheeren," said William.

"Your Highness——"

"For Heaven's sake——"

The crowd broke into the room.

They were armed with muskets, swords, pistols, and hatchets, and headed by the resolute Henry Dibbets.

William pushed back his chair and looked at them steadily under the brim of his beaver.

"What do you want, my friends?" he asked calmly.

"Tell them to disperse, Your Highness," urged the burgomaster.

A mass of people blocked the entrance into the room. They turned threateningly to the councillors.

"We are here to see justice done to His Highness," they declared fiercely.

"You seem very well disposed to my House," said the Prince, laying down his napkin.

The pastor pushed forward, flushed and triumphant.

"If there is anything His Highness wants," he cried, addressing the Prince, "let him ask for it—and we will see that he gets it."

William's eyes flashed under his lowered lids.

The bearing of the crowd confirmed the pastor's promise, proved that they were not mere words.

"Tell them to go home, Your Highness," pleaded the burgomaster; "this is against the laws——"

"This may alter the laws, Mynheer," answered the Prince proudly.

"Your Highness sides with this revolt!" cried M. Van Beveren.

William turned his powerful glance on the brother-in-law of M. de Witt.

"I do nothing, Mynheer," he answered coldly. "I wait"

for you—who sent for me—you who have the authority—to act——”

Henry Dibbets broke in—

“If they are at a loss, Your Highness, we will soon teach them what to do.”

The magistrates stood nonplussed, overwhelmed; for the people were plainly in earnest, plainly dangerous.

The town secretary, Orent Muys, whispered to the burgo-master that they had best yield.

The crowd, by now filling the room, caught up the words; with much violence they swore to massacre the councillors did they not at once proclaim the Prince as Stadtholder.

William sat immovable. It was obvious that he would neither pacify the crowd (if indeed he could) nor so declare himself or his wishes as to shift the responsibility to his from the shoulders of the magistrates; they, seeing that they could never leave the inn alive without submitting to the outcry of the people, and, indeed, in their hearts yielding to the general enthusiasm, consulted together. . . . How should they combine dignity with concession?

The Prince, without any attempt to influence them, remained silent at the head of the table.

The people did not give them long.

Urged forward by the pastor, two of them seized the burgo-master and presented a pistol to his forehead.

“You have played the fool long enough,” they declared angrily, “it is time to come to a decision.”

Finding himself in this pass, Van Hallingh called out lustily to Orent Muys, “Let him draw up a paper declaring the Prince elected as Stadtholder.”

“What of the Perpetual Edict?” asked William. “You have, I think, sworn to it.”

“We will absolve them of that oath!” shouted the citizens.

They commanded the landlord to bring pens, paper, and a standish, which he hastened to set down on the table among the plates and tankards.

With fingers a little trembling, Orent Muys wrote out an

article by which the Council of Dordt elected His Highness as Stadtholder and commander of the land and sea forces for life.

He was continually urged on by the crowd, who considered that he dallied in his task.

It was finished at last, amid yells of joy, and one after another the magistrates hastened to sign.

No one dared hesitate with a loaded blunderbuss at his head.

The only protest came from the Prince himself.

He rose.

The crowd instantly hushed.

He addressed equally the burgomaster, the councillors, and the citizens pressing round the table.

"Mynheeren," he said, "I am very sensible of the honour that you do me, but I have taken an oath—as Captain General—never to attempt the Stadtholdership."

The magistrates paused, astonished ; but the people were not in the least confounded.

"Your Highness took no oath to refuse the office if offered to you?"

"I took an oath," replied William, "nor can I lightly break it."

He spoke with no emotion, with the cold precision of a statesman, a manner that sat curiously on his youthful appearance ; it did not chill his supporters.

The magistrates themselves were driven to plead with him.

"For the good of the State we must ask Your Highness to yield."

"Ah," said the Prince, "*you* urge me?"

"In the name of the people——"

"Whose will is above the law," added Henry Dibbets.

"I swore before God," replied William.

"Then God shall absolve Your Highness," returned the pastor. "The usurper forced you to take an oath against justice . . . and I solemnly absolve Your Highness from it."

With one accord councillors, pastors, and citizens set William free of his vow to the Republic.

He yielded coldly, and the first act of the revolution was complete.

There is an emotion that bears the name of no one feeling because it is composed of all—it is the passion that shakes a crowd when it is witness of any great event; this seized the people of Dordt.

They shouted, laughed, wrung each other's hands, rushed in a mass to float the Orange flag from the belfry of their great church, drank the Prince's health and confusion to the French, and swarmed and pushed round the door of the Peacock Inn, where the councillors were still imprisoned.

The resolution, signed by the seventeen councillors present, the seals of the town affixed, was snatched up by the pastor Dibbets and displayed to the townsmen. Loud cries rang out—

“Long live the Stadtholder!”

“Long live His Highness!”

William looked at the magistrates—so they had been forced to return him the power they had taken from his father William II.

Many of them, indeed, were one and the same with the men who had defied him.

“Dordt is fortunate for Calvinists, Mynheeren,” he said, smiling. “They were successful in 1618; they win a victory to-day in me.”

It was his sole revenge on them for twenty years lost from his birthright; they received it in silence.

“If it be possible,” he added, “I should prefer now to return to Newerbrugge;” for he hated all display and commotion, and though this was a proud moment for him, he sighed for the quiet of the camp.

But it was not permitted.

He must hold a reception in the inn and receive the homage of the whole town of Dordt. Every one wanted to kiss his hand, to swear loyalty, to see the popular hero for himself.

At a moment when the unbridled enthusiasm was at its height a burgher captain chanced to notice that one name was missing. Seventeen councillors had signed for William.

There should have been one more.

One man in the whole of Dordt had not subscribed to the will of the people—

"Cornelius de Witt."

In a moment the crowd was on fire with this new idea—the eighteenth councillor must also sign. Here was a splendid opportunity for humiliating one of the hated family of the Grand Pensionary.

M. Beveren ventured to protest—

"The Ruard is ill—unable to leave his bed."

He was answered with derision.

"Not too ill to hold a pen—shall the worst traitor escape!"

M. Beveren appealed to the Prince.

"Highness, these men are miscalling M. de Witt."

But William answered coldly—

"Mynheer, the faction of M. de Witt have miscalled me for a good many years."

"But they will murder the Ruard."

"Let him sign," said William.

The crowd took up the cry.

"Let him sign!" they yelled.

The councillors hesitated. The Ruard would not subscribe, to force him to refuse would be to deliver him over to the fury of the mob.

But William decided for them.

"I think I have some weight in this town now," he said, with his immovable air of authority. He took the paper from the hand of the pastor and gave it to the town secretary. "Take this to M. de Witt, his signature is lacking. . . . You also," he pointed his cane at the captain of the burghers, "accompany him with some of your men. I am sorry M. de Witt is too sick to be present. I shall be pleased to see his name to this resolution."

CHAPTER V

CORNELIUS DE WITT

THE agitated secretary, the triumphant captain, and a vast crowd of excited citizens whom the civic guard could scarce restrain, proceeded to the house of M. Cornelius de Witt.

All day the Ruard's family had been in a state of acute alarm.

The late attack on the Pensionary, the popular feeling in Dordt, the burning of the pictures in the Stadhuis, the menacing aspect of the streets, all combined to render them grievously uneasy.

Only a few days previously three suspicious-looking strangers had demanded to see the Ruard, and on being refused, on account of the lateness of the hour, had attempted to force a way in, and had only been repulsed by the promptitude of the servant in calling help. Madam de Witt firmly believed that this was a murderous plot—a counterpart to that to which her brother-in-law had fallen a victim, and her fine courage could not subdue the terror inspired by the surroundings of hate, malice, and fury against which her helpless husband had no weapon.

To-day she had listened to the shouts that proclaimed a restoration, and showed that the magistrates, their sole protection, had been overawed by the people, and that no one in Dordt had dared to stand firm to the Government of John de Witt.

She could only hope that her husband might be forgotten in the general excitement, and with this quieted her cruel anxiety.

But when the servant came to tell her that a vast, armed crowd was advancing down the street she knew her hopes had been illusions. Her proud spirit, that had always supported her husband's dangers with high courage, sank before what she was called upon to face.

With yells, cries, and shouts for the new Stadtholder, on came the crowd, and surged about the door of the house. Let the town secretary get the signature of M. de Witt or they would enter and try for themselves.

Leaving some of the civic guard at the door as a concession to law and order, Orent Muys the secretary, the captain, and three of his soldiers entered the house.

Maria de Witt, pale and cold, outwardly calm, received them in the dining-room.

Her black eyes were full of tears, but she kept them fixed resolutely on the secretary.

The two men uncovered and bowed.

"What do you want?" she demanded, gripping the back of a chair.

"Your husband, Madam," answered M. Muys.

"You cannot see him."

"Madam, we must."

"He is ill——"

"The business is important."

"Mynheer, it is impossible——"

Captain Hoogewerf interposed—

"Madam, do you hear that noise outside?"

"Yes—yes."

"The people of Dordt—they are waiting to see the signature of M. de Witt to that paper M. Muys carries."

"What is it?"

"A resolution declaring His Highness William of Orange, Stadtholder of Dordt."

"My husband will never sign it."

"Do you think so, Madam?"

"I do"—this with instinctive pride.

The captain pointed with his gloved hand to the window.

"I should not care to answer for what that crowd may do, if disappointed, Madam."

"My husband," answered Madam de Witt, with a look of agony, "has sworn to the Perpetual Edict."

"So had the other councillors."

"Have they signed?"

"The signature of M. de Witt is the one lacking, Madam."

She tried to rally herself.

"This is a revolution——"

He corrected—

"A restoration."

"It has nothing to do with my husband——"

"He is a councillor of Dordt."

"Mynheer," she appealed to the secretary in great agitation,

"I swear to you M. de Witt is ill——"

"We only want his signature, Madam."

"He cannot hold a pen——"

"We must see that for ourselves," replied the captain.

She drew herself up—

"I will not admit you to his chamber—he is too ill."

She was desperate to forestall her husband's inevitable refusal to sign.

But Captain Hoogewerf was not to be moved from his purpose.

"Madam," he asked, "are not your children in the house?"

She shrank.

"What of it?"

"For their sakes, advise your husband to sign."

"What do you mean?"

"Madam—the people——"

She interrupted—

"Is the town delivered over to the mob?"

"It is in the hands of the friends of His Highness."

"I think that means the same thing," she flashed.

The captain became impatient.

"The paper—Madam—we must see M. de Witt."

"What if he refuse?" she asked in a desperate voice.

"He will not refuse."

"Before God, he will!" she cried, knowing him.

"You must persuade him——"

"To his own dishonour?"

"For his own safety."

"I cannot——"

"Think of your children, Madam."

She was silent.

"Madam," urged the secretary, "I entreat you do not make delays that must further inflame the people."

Madam de Witt dared resist no longer; she heard the furious din without, she saw the immovable face of Captain Hoogewerf, and, through her open door, the scarlet coats of the soldiers in the corridor.

She did not think her husband would sign; she made the anguished resolve that she must persuade him to it—even against her conscience.

"I will take the paper to him," she said, with the instinct to soften the humiliation of her husband's consent.

But Captain Hoogewerf saw her motive.

"No, Madam, it must be in our presence."

She passed in silence to the door, the sunlight on her dark velvet gown, the deep lace collar on her shoulders not more white than her face.

The secretary followed her reluctantly; he hated his task; he had been overawed. Hoogewerf, however, an ardent Orangist, had no compunction.

He bade his soldiers follow him.

"Is this necessary?" asked Maria de Witt proudly.

"Such are my orders, Madam."

"My husband is no criminal, Mynheer, that soldiers should enter his bed-chamber."

"You lose time—you will regret it," he answered.

A delicate colour rose into her beautiful, still face.

"This tone is new among us," she said, "we—who have always boasted of our liberty——"

"Take care what you say, Madam," Captain Hoogewerf warned her, "the Prince of Orange is master now."

The republican lady paused, her fingers on the handle of her husband's chamber door.

"One may know it," she replied coldly, "by your change of front, Mynheer—even yesterday *you* would not have dared to insult a de Witt."

"Madam!" pleaded the terrified secretary.

She opened the door and passed before them into the darkened and lofty bed-chamber.

The valet had been before them, and had warned his master of what was happening.

They found him standing by the great bed with its gold and crimson hangings supporting the Ruard, who, weak and faint with suffering, was endeavouring to sit up against the pillows.

At the first glance round his simple privacy, the instant impression of a sick and helpless man, the secretary fell back, but Captain Hoogewerf strode forward.

The eyes of Cornelius de Witt shone in his worn face with as proud a light as they had shown when he kept his place on the deck of *The Seven Provinces* amid the hurry of battle.

"Captain Hoogewerf," he said in a feeble but resolute voice, "what means this unruly entrance?"

"It means," he was answered, "that this town is now under the government of His Highness the Stadtholder."

Cornelius de Witt frowned haughtily. His wife stepped to his bedside, and stood with her hand on the curtain looking from him to the captain, from him to the secretary.

Just inside the door the three soldiers waited.

Orent Muys, speaking with more consideration, informed the Ruard of the revolution in Dordt, and produced his paper with the hanging seals.

"This is against the law," said M. de Witt.

"Mynheer—it *is* the law—all the magistrates have signed."

The secretary held out the document as he spoke.

"Then they are perjured," replied the Ruard proudly.

"Do you use that word of His Highness' friends?" demanded Captain Hoogewerf in a loud voice.

Cornelius de Witt drew himself up higher in his bed—

"I use that word of any one who has sworn to the Perpetual Edict and then declares His Highness Stadtholder."

His wife turned to him quickly.

"Cornelius—His Highness is master in Dordt—M. Muys hath come to read you the act so proclaiming him."

He glanced at her rather curiously, and she, reading some reproach in his eyes, sank down on the chair at his bedside and hid her face in her hand.

M. de Witt pushed back the long dark hair from his ravaged face, and fixed the secretary with a cold and undaunted look.

"Why are you come here to read me that?" he demanded.

The soldier replied—

"We desire your signature."

"I think," said the Ruard scornfully, "ye do not find it necessary."

"As collector of taxes, superintendent of the dykes, magistrate of Dordt, and Ruard of Putten—your signature is indeed necessary."

Maria de Witt raised her face.

"Do you not hear them in the street?" she whispered.

Her husband neither answered her nor looked in her direction.

"Read this document," he ordered curtly.

The secretary obeyed.

When he had finished the Ruard stole a glance at his wife, who sat with averted face; he seemed to be listening to the impatient and angry cries without, that, mingled with snatches of St. Aldegonde's hymn, and curses on the Grand Pensionary's name, came clearly through the curtained window.

"Cannot that be worded less positively?" he asked slowly.

"Mynheer, it is impossible," answered the secretary.

"We came for your signature, not for your amendments," remarked the soldier.

"I would rather be killed in my bed than sign," answered the Ruard, with a flush of colour into his face.

Hoogewerf stepped forward threateningly.

"I have sworn an oath to the Perpetual Edict," said M. de Witt, "and I will keep it—even if you strike off my head with the sword you have there at your side."

"I have not come as an assassin," replied the captain.

"Well," answered the Ruard, "there are plenty of vagabonds and ruffians below who would not hesitate—call up some of them."

"Oh, Mynheer!" cried the distressed secretary, "those you hear are friends of His Highness—respectable people—they only clamour for your signature."

M. de Witt turned away his head as if in weariness.

"Whatever happens," he said shortly, "I cannot sign."

His wife put out her hand and clasped his that lay on the coverlet.

"Cornelius," she urged in an unsteady voice, "it is not safe to refuse."

"As a citizen of Dordt I cannot do otherwise," he answered briefly.

"There are the children," said Maria de Witt.

The Ruard flashed a stern look at the secretary.

"Are you incapable of protecting my house and family?" he demanded.

Orent Muys answered in great agitation—

"Mynheer, His Highness has been proclaimed Stadtholder—he is now at the Peacock Inn receiving the homage of the crowd—and I have to take your signature back to him—otherwise—really, Mynheer, I could not answer for it—they are all worthy people, such as your own baker or butcher might be—but they are . . . excited——"

He paused as the fierce sounds of a tussle between the mob and the burgher guards rose from the street.

Maria de Witt sprang up and went to the window.

She was seen from below and greeted with a yell of fury and a shower of pebbles.

"Cornelius—" she came back breathlessly—"they will break in——"

"And if they do?"—the Ruard questioned Captain Hoogewerf.

"Then, I think," was the answer, "that they will serve you as they served your portrait in the Stadhuis."

Madam de Witt gave a little cry, and her husband's eyes flashed.

"Then make an end now," he exclaimed passionately. "I would rather be stabbed in my bed than be torn to pieces by the mob."

"Oh, my dear Mynheer, if you would only sign!" cried the secretary.

"I cannot."

Maria de Witt went on her knees, clasping her hands against the coverlet."

"Oh, Cornelius—I must entreat."

He turned his sad brown eyes on her with an expression of gentle reproach.

"Ah, *you*!" he said. "You have always been so brave—so careful of my honour."

"I cannot face this," she answered desperately. "I cannot—they will murder you—and the children are in the house."

"You must send them away."

"It is impossible—there is a crowd back and front."

"Maria," he said in an anguished tone, "I cannot sign."

He turned his face from her, and she sprang to her feet with her hand to her brow.

The lace on her bosom rose painfully with her agitated breathing, the pearls pressed tight round her swelling throat; her countenance, framed in the long black ringlets, was suffused and trembling.

"Have you no regard for your wife?" asked Captain Hoogewerf.

"I have some regard for my honour," replied the Ruard, wiping his forehead, damp with anguish of mind and body.

The sound of blows and splintering wood told that the door was being forced.

Bloodthirsty cries of rage and triumph pierced the din of the attack.

"Down with the friends of France!"

"Show us the signature!"

"Down with the enemies of His Highness!"

"Death to the friends of King Louis!"

"I did not show myself friendly to France in Southwold bay," said Cornelius de Witt grimly.

"Sign, Mynheer," begged the secretary, "or we shall all be murdered!"

A stone hurtled through the window and struck one of the posts of the bed.

"Oh, God help us!" exclaimed Maria de Witt. She flung herself on her knees again. "My lord—for the sake of the children——"

A musket was fired below, and one of the servants shrieked.

"Well, Mynheer," asked Captain Hoogewerf, "how much longer are we to wait?"

"Put your pistol through my head," answered the Ruard hoarsely, "for I will not be torn to pieces by the mob." He repeated—"That is a horrible death—to be torn in pieces by the mob."

Maria de Witt was bitterly weeping.

"If you will not sign," she said in despair, "then I must leave you—God help me, I must see to some means of safety for my children."

The secretary had snatched up a pen, and now came to the bedside and forced it into the Ruard's fingers.

"Oh, you are a father before you are a citizen!" exclaimed Maria de Witt. "This is not perjury—you are absolved by the actions of the others."

Slowly Cornelius de Witt took up the quill in his feeble fingers.

He bit his full under-lip and his eyes narrowed.

"What will be said of a man who was vanquished by his wife's tears?" he muttered.

He could scarcely hold the pen.

He looked at his wife—

"Maria, Maria, dost thou think this compliance can save me from the inevitable?"

There was a silence as he dipped his quill in the ink and reluctantly traced his name—the last on the list.

Then, as the secretary took the paper, Madam de Witt rose with a breath of agonised relief.

But Orent Muys, looking at the writing, cried out—

"What is this, Mynheer?—what have you put after your name—two letters—V.C.?"

"That means *Vi coactus*," replied the Ruard shortly; "if you have forgot your Latin the translation runs—'constrained by force.'"

"This is but playing with us!" exclaimed Captain Hoogewerf.

"I implore you, Mynheer," urged the secretary. "You will only rouse the fury of the people—scratch out those letters."

"I shall not retract them," he answered. "'Constrained by force,' otherwise I should not have signed."

The secretary looked at the captain and the captain at the soldiers.

Orent Muys tried persuasions and Hoogewerf threats.

But Cornelius de Witt was immovable; he turned away his face on the pillow and was silent.

Maria de Witt dropped the red curtain of the bed, and, unseen by her husband, drew the paper from the secretary's hand.

With her finger on her lips she silenced them, and withdrawing to the back of the chamber hastily effaced the two letters—"V.C."

"You are very scrupulous, Mynheer," said Captain Hoogewerf.

"It seems I am the only one in Dordt," returned the Ruard, "who remembers his duty."

Captain Hoogewerf clapped on his hat.

"You will be sorry, some day, that you spoke so recklessly," he said, and strode out of the room, followed by the soldiers and the secretary.

Maria de Witt leant heavily against the bed-post, pressing her handkerchief to her reddened eyes.

A loud, triumphant, and insulting shout told the joy of the crowd when they heard that the Ruard had submitted, and with a mighty turmoil, and sound of singing and cheering, they swept away up the street to the Peacock Inn.

Cornelius de Witt clenched his hand on the coverlet.

"I had better have died," he murmured.

His wife came and bent over his pillow.

"Do you blame me?" she asked, shuddering. "Ah, you think that I have been weak."

"No," he answered, "there were the children . . . but nothing can save us, Maria."

"They have gone," she breathed.

"Yes, now," he answered mournfully; "but what can protect us, John and me, against the whole country's hate?"

She cried out passionately—

"They cannot hate you—it is impossible!"

He leant back exhausted.

"You have heard to-day, dearest, how they hate me—the Prince is master now."

"The Prince," she said in terror,—“he would not allow any harm to come to you.”

"I should not ask for his protection; he is not *my* master—nor shall be."

She went on her knees beside the bed and laid her lips to his hand.

"God Almighty guard us," she whispered. "He who is greater than princes has us in His charge, Cornelius."

"Amen, amen," cried the Ruard. "And may He give me courage to meet the exceeding bitterness of my inevitable end!"

He laid his free hand on her bowed black head, and the tears welled up into his eyes for the ruin of the ideals to which he had given his life.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESTORATION

M. GASPARD FAGEL, excited, rather better dressed than usual, with an orange ribbon in his button-hole, arrived early in the afternoon at the Grand Pensionary's house in the Kneuterdyk Avenue.

He found M. de Witt seated languidly at the open window of his library, wearing a loose Japanese robe and gazing out at the sunny garden and the doves in the trees.

On the chair beside him lay an open portfolio of sketches.

"You are recovered, Mynheer?" asked M. Fagel, with some embarrassment.

The Grand Pensionary smiled sadly.

"I hope to be able to resume my duties very soon."

He roused himself and sat up.

"Be seated," he said. "Will you move those drawings—they are M. Van der Welde's sketches of Solebay battle, made from his galiot—His Highness is fond of pictures, he had best commission the paintings."

It was said gently, without a trace of bitterness.

M. Fagel coughed.

"I am come," he said, "to tell you of a restoration."

"I knew," answered John de Witt, "that it must be so."

Gaspard Fagel drew himself up with some importance.

"The Deputies of Holland have proclaimed His Highness Stadtholder and Captain General of the Republic for life, with all the dignities formerly belonging to his ancestors."

In these pompous words sounded the death-knell of the life-long labour, hopes, policy, and ideals of John de Witt.

He looked out again upon the doves in the trembling elm boughs.

"They have kept me short of news, for I have been very ill," he answered quietly, "but I have known how it must end."

Gaspard Fagel was full of his subject.

"The Deputies left two days ago for Bodegraven, that they may acquaint His Highness and bring him to the Hague to take the oaths."

"Something I heard of that."

M. Fagel was exultant.

"It is not a fortnight since Dordt gave the signal—Rotterdam was the next. We had the whole country in a flame—the peasants took possession of Delft—it was irresistible—irresistible! The States were swept off their feet—the inexorable conditions imposed by France helped—the Perpetual Edict was repealed—even Amsterdam clamoured for the Prince. I tell you, Mynheer, he is King, though without the name."

"The people have overawed the magistrates," remarked M. de Witt. "What need for the details?—the Prince is Stadtholder."

He was still looking out of the window, and the reflection of the green trees gave a ghastly hue to his worn, colourless face.

"What of the war?" he asked.

Gaspard Fagel lifted his shoulders.

"The Bishop of Munster overruns Groningen—but the Elector and the Spanish troops are expected soon. The people are wonderfully heartened, they can think of nothing but the Prince."

"How did he take this change of fortune?" asked the Grand Pensionary.

"He met the Deputies of Rotterdam with cold reserve, and said he would not have the people force the magistrates—he would have his rights by law, not violence. He met the States at Bodegraven in his carriage, and asked them first if he was relieved of his oath; they said Yes, and then he merely told

them he took the office for the good of the country. M. Beuningen was there all the time."

John de Witt answered quietly—

"The Prince never lacked for prudence, he will not perish by his father's fault."

"He is the idol of the people—M. Beuningen says the soldiers worship him."

"He has great qualities," said M. de Witt, "and I have educated him to be a patriot,—I hope he may fulfil the expectancy of the people."

M. Fagel looked uneasy.

"Well," he said, "I do not know why I talk of this so much. I came about your business, Mynheer."

The Grand Pensionary flushed.

"My memorial to Their High Mightinesses?" he asked.

"Even that, Mynheer."

The Grand Pensionary roused himself.

"I trust," he said proudly, "they have been pleased to consider how very bitter it was to me to have to stoop to justify myself against the attacks of a pamphleteer."

Gaspard Fagel answered hastily—

"It was, of course, malicious folly."

"There were many who believed in it, therefore I was forced to reply."

"Their Noble Mightinesses declare there is no truth in the charges."

"I am glad they do me that justice," said John de Witt simply.

Gaspard Fagel frowned.

"But I am obliged to add, Mynheer, that what Their Noble Mightinesses say carries no weight now whatever—and I fear these charges against you are as eagerly believed as ever."

"They must be refuted," replied the Grand Pensionary with energy. "I will not have these hideous stains upon my name."

M. Fagel shook his head.

"There is only one man whose voice can be heard now, Mynheer."

"The Prince?"

"Yes, His Highness the Stadtholder."

"Then," declared John de Witt, proudly and calmly, "I will write to him. He will have the nobility to see justice done. He knows that I have not taken the Secret Service money—or——" He made an impatient gesture, "I cannot repeat them—but the Prince knows what manner of man I am."

"The people will listen to him—but to none other; what he says I think they will credit."

John de Witt gave a little sigh. The Secretary of the States was slightly uncomfortable in his presence; disconcerted before his utter serenity.

Gaspard Fagel had an uneasy feeling that de Witt's was the calm of a heart-broken man. He sat looking at the Minister whom he had followed, envied, rivalled, and now supplanted, and his triumph was by no means unalloyed.

The Grand Pensionary turned his full brown eyes on him.

"What will the Prince do with his power?"

"One cannot tell. Frankly, he makes no confidant of me or any; it is thought he will break off the negotiations with King Louis. He still hopes to detach the English."

"Yet could not come to terms with them at Newerbrugge——"

"It is not known what passed there. M. Beuningen thinks they made him secret offers and that he refused them—at least, he is hot against M. de Groot. Some say he will be arrested on the ground of having exceeded his commission. M. de Montbas' action has not helped his case."

"What hath M. de Montbas done?" demanded John de Witt.

"Joined the French," returned Gaspard Fagel laconically.

"M. de Montbas—has deserted to the French?" exclaimed John de Witt.

"He was, you know, a prisoner, arrested for gross failure in duty, and when he saw the Prince was resolved on his life, he became desperate and, contriving to escape, fled to the enemy. King Louis will forgive him, doubtless, for the information he is able to supply now."

The Grand Pensionary was silent.

"You must see," added M. Fagel, "that this does not improve your credit with the people."

John de Witt raised his tired eyes.

"I do not know, Mynheer," he said quietly, "why you have come to tell me all this."

Gaspard Fagel rose restlessly.

On a table near by was a white china pot full of tulips; he stopped beside this and stared into the flame-coloured cups, where the dusty, black pistils showed.

"I should advise you to leave the Hague," he said.

"I cannot leave my post," answered the Grand Pensionary.

"Your illness is a fair excuse."

John de Witt shook his head.

"The country still needs me," he said. "In a few days I hope to be again in the Assembly."

Gaspard Fagel pulled at the tulip petals.

"I am your friend," he declared.

The Grand Pensionary gave him a quiet look.

"Yes, your friend," Fagel repeated defiantly. "Do not think because I follow the Prince that I am no friend to you. I have much, very much to be grateful to you for. I—" he hesitated a second—"I should like to do you a service now."

By now John de Witt had turned his eyes from him to the pattern of blue sky to be seen through the intertwisting leaves and branches of the elms and limes.

Gaspard Fagel stuck his fingers into his sash.

"In this state we are in," he said, "we cannot afford internal dissension."

The phrase sounded trite to M. de Witt; he raised his long hand on the arm of the chair and let it fall again.

"I am ambitious," continued M. Fagel, "to be a mediator——"

"Well?"

"Between you and His Highness."

The Grand Pensionary answered without turning his head.

"In what manner?"

M. Fagel was rather at a loss to express himself.

"His Highness is Stadtholder," he remarked.

"Nevertheless, I am still Grand Pensionary, Mynheer."

"The office remains—yes," replied M. Fagel. "But it must be filled by a man who will work with His Highness."

John de Witt showed some signs of agitation.

"M. Fagel," he said, sitting erect, "if you are here to suggest that I work under His Highness, the mere secretary of his ambition, the servant of his designs—I beg you, say no more."

"This is not reasonable."

"It is very reasonable." John de Witt's voice was stern. "For twenty years I have stood at the helm of this Republic. I have guided her through storms and perils; through God's help I have always maintained her dignity and prosperity. An uncorrupt, free Republic was my ideal. Well, I served it, I have fallen, I have failed—I have been repaid with hate where I worked for love—but I will never be the tool of the Prince who has destroyed my work, nor help the people set a yoke again upon their necks."

"Mynheer, you talk rashly—we are as free as ever we were."

John de Witt's eyes flashed.

"You deceive yourself. You have put at the head of the State a young man with a temper as imperious as any of his House—a Stewart for pride, a Nassau for firmness. Were we free in the days of Prince Maurice? We shall not be free under this youth. For twenty years we have tasted real liberty, and now he will make us pay . . ."

Gaspard Fagel replied vehemently—

"Indeed you wrong His Highness . . . he is the sole hope of the country. . . . I believe that he will save us."

"Others could have saved you, had you permitted them. . . . If he be a patriot, he is not the only one in the United Provinces."

"This attitude is dangerous," said Gaspard Fagel.

John de Witt looked at him with an air almost of pity.

"Do you think that I will alter the whole aim of my life to

buy a little favour now? Do you imagine that I will trim my course to please this youth who was my pupil?"

"And now is your master."

"I do not admit it, nor ever will—there is no master in this Republic."

M. Fagel answered with some impatience—

"So—you are not tractable—you will not work under the Prince?"

"I will work with him, when I agree with him."

"Very well—you cannot expect, Mynheer, to find the Stadtholder friendly."

"I expect," said John de Witt proudly, "to find him just."

"This attitude of yours will not please him."

"I cannot care for that."

"He is all powerful——"

John de Witt interrupted—

"I do not think that he will use his power to gratify his political dislikes. He knows my principles, he knows that I am likely to abide by them; he cannot be either surprised or angered that he does not see me swell the crowd gathered to do him homage."

Gaspard Fagel frowned.

"That is your decision—your final decision?"

John de Witt bent his head.

"Yes." Then he added keenly, "Did the Prince send you?"

"I have not seen him since the opening of the war, nor has he mentioned this question in his letters, but M. Beuningen says he remarked to him that you must bend or break."

John de Witt faintly smiled.

"I also can be inflexible," he said. "I can serve my ideal as steadily as His Highness serves his ambition."

Gaspard Fagel seemed troubled.

"If you continue to oppose the Prince," he said bluntly, "you will scarcely be safe at the Hague."

"Are you trying to frighten me?"

"I am warning you. Join with the Prince, or resign and leave the Hague."

The Grand Pensionary replied firmly—

"Neither one nor the other, Mynheer. I will not forsake the policy I have adhered to all my life, nor will I leave my post until I am relieved of it."

M. Fagel bit his forefinger. He had a sincere regard for M. de Witt, and his conscience troubled him because the Grand Pensionary had given him this secretaryship he now held, and did not utter a word of reproach.

"It is like a great storm," he said, "sweeping everything before it; they who fling themselves down may escape, but they who remain erect are certainly carried away—and perish."

John de Witt gazed at him steadily.

"You are an able man, Mynheer Fagel. I think you will be of great service to the Prince and the country, but for me you can do nothing . . . there is no more to be said."

The Secretary smoothed the bands at his wrists, slightly coloured, and bit his lip.

Hesitating, he glanced sideways at the Grand Pensionary once or twice.

John de Witt had turned his eyes away, and by his demeanour seemed not to know there was another with him in the room.

At last Gaspard Fagel gathered up his hat and cane and left the quiet library without another word.

John de Witt kept his gaze still on the sky.

The leaves, and the chinks of it seen between them, took on a thousand different, changing shapes—gold, green, and blue.

The sun reached the glossy box hedges in tendrils of spangled light and gilded the tulips (over-blown now and ragged) with a keen yellow.

The Grand Pensionary's vision was bounded by a deep red beech tree, through whose heavy branches the sky appeared bright and pale, and in the shadow it threw, two

ash-coloured doves were walking on the smooth sweep of close grass.

John de Witt felt so weary that there was a pain even in resting, a disquietude in gazing at the pictured peace of the high-walled garden.

It seemed that only oblivion could give ease to his languid body and aching soul.

In a breath had gone the labour of a lifetime.

He had worked incredibly, with sincerity, with passion, with unsparing patience and energy; and for reward he was thrust aside with hatred and curses for the sake of the heir of the old House from whose tyranny he had saved his country.

No one believed in him, no one trusted in his honour.

He had always been of an integrity above suspicion, but it did not save him from being accused of the vilest crimes. He had given his life to his country, and was reproached with having sold her to her enemies.

He had always lived as simply as an ordinary citizen, nevertheless it was laid to his charge that he had appropriated large sums from the public funds.

Calumny was triumphant; there was no stain she did not try to cast on the name of a man who had never committed a single unworthy action.

His former good fame availed him nothing; the prosperity of the country under his rule was not remembered to his credit now.

Malice would not listen to reason nor justice.

And there was no one who dared speak for him save those helpless in a like case. There were a few faithful, his brother-in-law, Vivien, Pensionary of Dordt, Peter de Groot, Colonel Bampffield, but their voices could not be heard above the shrieks of the factions. They had their own several lives and honours to look to; if they could no longer support him he could no longer protect them.

He laid his hand on the bandage round his right arm, that covered a still aching wound.

The little senseless chatter of the birds in the branches,

the faint murmurs of the wind, were not so strong as a tumult of imaginary sounds that beat loud and threatening on the inner senses of John de Witt.

The cries of an angry crowd, the beating of alarm bells, the hurrying of eager feet, swelling in volume, coming nearer . . .

Through the green and gold and blue glimpsed a vision of these people : furious faces, threatening gestures, brandished weapons ; dangerous, powerful, irresistible ; a hymn of triumph, of hatred, on their lips, and their hearts hot for blood.

John de Witt rose and held out his hand before him as if sound and sight were real, and so stood for a moment, in the attitude of an orator, pleading before his enemies.

Then he turned quickly from the window and walked up and down the long, sunny room.

After a few moments he stopped and took down a gilt-clasped Bible from the shelf.

He opened it ; but before his eyes were still the furious faces of his countrymen, and in his ears the ominous sound of their greedy, oncoming hate.

CHAPTER VII

"I WILL MAINTAIN"

THE new Stadtholder took his seat in the Assembly, accepted the position offered him, swore the oaths to the Republic, tactfully abstained from any speech, and merely expressed his intention of returning to Bodegraven at once.

The Hague was in a frenzy. The hero of the moment was offered a triumph, a banquet, a ball . . .

He declined all, something coldly, and reminded the Deputies the Republic was in no condition for rejoicing.

He intended obviously to avoid as much as possible the demonstrations of the crowd. He refused a public entry; but he could not prevent the people from drinking his health at every street corner and sending up fireworks as soon as it was dark.

As he left the Assembly M. Fagel advanced to speak to him.

"Is Your Highness satisfied now?" he asked eagerly.

"I am pleased with the title," answered the Prince; "see to it I have the substance—I will be no Duke of Venice, Fagel."

The Secretary could not but remember M. de Witt's words of that morning. . . . Certainly they would find no puppet ruler in William of Orange.

Already his manner had changed. As cold, as composed as before, it now showed openly that imperious haughtiness he had often had to conceal under mere reserve or enforced graciousness.

He bore himself as if a king. His excessive pride might not deign to express itself in any outward show, but he revealed

clearly enough that if he was to be the deliverer of his country he would also be her master.

Secure in the support of the people, he could do as he pleased with the magistrates. The whole country was at his mercy.

Those who had been in opposition to him trembled; his enemies were in despair.

Now, as he paused on the stairs to speak to Fagel, M. de Groot came out of the room of the Assembly.

"Mynheer," William called him.

Gaspard Fagel shivered.

Pale, tired, but erect, Peter de Groot came forward.

"Your Highness?"

The Stadtholder was drawing on his gloves.

"I advised you, Mynheer, not to undertake that journey to Zeyst, you remember?"

"Perfectly, Your Highness."

"Well"—the Prince, having finished with his gloves, removed his cane from under his arm and tapped the baluster—"I now advise you to leave the Hague."

M. de Groot was undaunted.

"I am aware that Your Highness blames *me* for the terms of peace I brought from the King of France—I would rather die than accept them—but as an ambassador it was my bare duty to carry them to Their Noble Mightinesses—who had sent me."

"M. de Groot," replied the Prince unpleasantly, "we will have no discussion, if you please. Again—I should recommend the Spanish Netherlands."

M. Fagel moved instinctively a step aside, but Peter de Groot stood his ground. He saw himself a fallen man, a ruined man, and a slow paleness overspread his countenance, but there was no alteration in his proud demeanour.

Followed by Mynheer Fagel, William III. turned away without a salute, and, with the curtest acknowledgment of the councillors and nobles gathered about him, passed out into the courtyard of the Binnenhof.

It was too late to return to the camp, against his will he found himself obliged to stay overnight at the Hague.

His own Palace being closed, William was lodged in the splendid house, almost adjoining the Binnenhof, where Prince John Maurice had gathered all the treasures collected in his travels.

No attendants following, the Stadtholder crossed the courtyard and gained the mansion without being observed by any.

Dinner was already served in the gorgeous dining-room, where the old Prince's parrot from Brazil (who could distinguish a black man from a white, could swear nicely in Spanish, and knew his master for a great man) swung in his glittering ebony ring.

M. Heenvliet was in attendance, and a few of Prince Maurice's servants.

"Has Mynheer Bentinck arrived?" asked the Prince.

"Not yet, Your Highness."

Bentinck had been sent to the Princess Amalia with the news of her grandson's triumph.

"Nor the messenger from Sir Gabriel Sylvius?"

"No, Highness—but there have been many to wait upon you——"

"I will see no one save those two."

On the dark bureau a heap of congratulatory letters had already accumulated. The Prince picked some up, glanced at the writings, and laid them down unopened; a few were from his friends, many from his enemies, some from people he did not know at all.

He put aside his violet velvet cloak, his cane, hat, and gloves, and opened the window regardless of the breeze that set the candles guttering.

It was a beautiful evening, clear, not warm for July, the sky cloudless and a fresh wind blowing.

William stood holding back the heavy curtain and looking out at the dark shapes of the houses above which now and then a shower of light from bonfire or rocket rose into the sky.

The excited murmurs from the crowds filling the Plein came

distinctly to his ears ; he could almost hear them shouting his name.

M. Heenvliet had withdrawn, for the moment he was alone, but there came no change into the perfect calm of his face and bearing.

An observer might have well thought that he felt no emotion, and concluded that to feel no emotion at such a moment was indeed to show himself incapable of being roused by any feeling ever.

The Groote Kerk struck seven.

William left the window and went to the table glittering with glass and silver, the sheen of china, and the sparkle of the candles in the gold and crimson wines.

The parrot gave a low scream and eyed him in friendly fashion.

William looked at it thoughtfully. It had a drooping air, as if it knew that its master was shut up with the garrison in Maestricht, far away from the luxury of this comfortable room with its Persian carpet, rich hangings, valuable pictures and statuary.

It had also an air of self-containment that moved the Prince's admiration ; he crossed to its ring and gently stroked its head. The bird swung itself in violent agitation of some kind, dropped headlong from its perch, and with a sweep of its gay wing cast several of the letters on the bureau at William's feet.

He stooped to pick them up ; the writing on one caught his eye.

He stared at it a moment and flushed ; then quickly broke it open.

It was matter of only a few lines ; when he had read it he took up his hat and mantle instantly and left the room.

M. Heenvliet saw him passing hastily down the wide stairs, and could hardly credit his eyes . . .

He ran after him.

But the Prince crossed the courtyard without looking back, and as M. Heenvliet gained the gate he saw the slight figure disappearing in the shadows in the direction of the Plein.

His Highness' gentleman was utterly bewildered. As he stood irresolute, hatless, at the gate, a horseman galloped up and dismounted.

M. Heenvliet knew him for Florent Van Mander, the expected messenger from Sir Gabriel Sylvius.

"The Prince——" began the newcomer.

"Sir," cried M. Heenvliet, "he has this moment left the house alone—leaving no message——"

"And the Hague in this commotion!"

"He was about to sit down to dinner—he but waited M. Bentinck——"

"He was armed?"

"With only a sword."

"I will go after him."

"Dare you?"

"If I can be of any service to him I dare anything, Mynheer."

"It is the strangest thing."

Florent was already resolved.

"What was he wearing?"

"A violet coat and mantle—a black hat and feather——"

"See to the horse, I will go after him. . . . He is rash . . . the streets are not safe to-night."

While M. Heenvliet was still half urging, half protesting, Florent started at a run across the Plein.

But his progress was soon stopped by the crowd, the coaches, horsemen and soldiers who thronged the square.

Many of the people were dancing by torchlight before their houses, and handing out wine to every passer-by to drink the health of the new Stadtholder.

The crackling of fireworks mingled with the murmurs and the shouts; hawkers were selling copies of pamphlets against John de Witt, and the dying speech of Jacob Van der Graef who was held up as a martyr to the Orange cause.

It was a riot of enthusiastic joy. Every one wore an orange ribbon, and from every house, steeple, booth, and coach waved the Orange flag.

Florent, forced to pause, remembered that he had absolutely

no clue to the Prince's destination, but as he made his way on through the press, as best he could, he reminded himself that William would also find crossing the Plein a difficult matter.

He looked eagerly round through the confusion of twilight, torchlight, and the steadier gleam of lantern, and presently noticed a gentleman in a violet mantle making a slow way through a group of burghers gathering round the open door of a tavern.

Van Mander forced himself as near as he could get—not near enough to be sure . . .

Finally the violet cavalier turned down the Houtestraat, with Florent not far behind.

It was less crowded here, and by the time they had reached the Kalvermarkt Van Mander had his man clear. But suddenly the gentleman in violet stopped to ask his way of a man seated outside a grocery shop, and upon receiving the answer turned so quickly down an ill-lit side street that Florent lost sight of him.

Breaking into a run, he plunged down the dark turning, his spurs clattering on the cobbles.

The street was almost empty, the houses dark; for the inhabitants were gathered in the principal thoroughfares.

Florent was brought to a stop in a lonely little square planted with chestnut trees. He looked up and saw an orange flag projected from a gabled window, from which issued the ruddy light of a lamp that stained the folds to a deep brilliance against the purple colour of the evening sky.

At the door of this house stood an old man in a white ruff, smoking.

Florent addressed him.

"Has a gentleman wearing violet been past here, Mynheer?"

"A moment ago—yes."

"Which way did he take?" Florent asked eagerly. For the square was divided by a canal.

The old man was laconic.

"He asked the way."

"To——?"

"The Heeren Gracht."

"Which is round the corner is it not?"

"Yes."

"Did you see this gentleman's face?"

The other began to grow suspicious.

"What did you want with him?"

Florent did not hesitate.

"I am a servant of his—at least, if it be he whom I think—and am come after him with a message."

"Well," said the old man, "he was not tall nor stout—he was young and thin, with a hooked nose like his Highness the Stadtholder has——"

"Then he is my master," said Florent, and hurried on.

As he turned the length of the dark canal he saw by the light of the lamps with which it was set the violet mantle not far away from him.

Its owner appeared to be hesitating, and endeavouring to distinguish the signs displayed on the tall house-fronts.

Van Mander, rather breathless, ran up to him; there was no one else in sight.

"Your Highness——"

The Prince turned sharply.

Before he could speak, Florent went on—

"Sir, you must forgive me, it is I, Van Mander. . . . I rode up as you left the Marithuis . . . I followed you."

Somewhat to his surprise the Prince seemed neither astonished nor angry.

"Why?" he asked in an absorbed fashion.

"Sir, it is dangerous. . . . If you knew what I know—what I heard at Zeyst . . ."

"I am safe enough," said William, still gazing up at the houses.

"There are plots abroad to assassinate Your Highness."

"Without doubt," the Prince replied absently. "I wish to find a house that hath for sign a pair of scales—it is somewhere near here, I think."

"On what adventure is Your Highness engaged?" demanded Florent anxiously.

It seemed to him that William neither knew nor cared who spoke to him. He showed no sign of remembering that he awaited news from Sir Gabriel; he appeared to be entirely engaged in the matter on hand.

"Now, how may we find it?" was his sole comment, as he turned impatiently along the canal.

"It is too dark to see the sign—a few houses have lamps above the door," said Florent.

"Help me to look. I would rather charge a thousand men with a hundred than lose an hour now."

The Prince took Florent's presence as a matter of course, neither desiring nor resenting it.

They proceeded in silence along the stone causeway.

Florent was the first to catch the gleam of a pair of gilt scales dangling over the low portico of one of the doors.

"Shall I wait here for Your Highness?" he asked.

"You may enter if you will."

Still the Prince gave the impression of being so absorbed in some particular affair that he did not know to whom he spoke.

But as they waited on the winged steps, after having hastily knocked, he suddenly explained himself.

"My old tutor, Mynheer Cornelius Triglandt, wrote to me that he was lying ill here. I did not even know that he was at the Hague."

Florent looked sharply at the Prince. After all, despite his gravity, reserve, and caution, William had then an honest simplicity; . . . and, with all his pride, the frankness of single-mindedness, and the winning modesty of youth and quick affection.

The door was opened by a girl wearing a garnet necklace, a white cap, and long gold earrings glimmering in the lamp-light.

"Mynheer Cornelius Triglandt is here?" asked the Prince quickly.

"Yes, Mynheer."

She opened the door wider and they passed into the cedar-wood hall.

"Is he very ill?" questioned William.

The maiden looked at them with a faint surprise.

"I do not think that he expects any one to visit him, Mynheer."

"No?" the Prince's voice was gentler than Florent had thought it could be, "but he will be glad to see me."

The girl hesitated with her hand on the newel post.

"Who shall I say is here—to M. Triglandt?" she asked.

The Prince stood in a slightly awkward fashion, holding his hat across his chest; he fixed the speaker with his luminous eyes in a bewildered manner.

The girl glanced over him; took in his velvet mantle, his fringed gloves, his square-toed shoes with the stiff satin bows.

"M. Triglandt is a friend of the Stadtholder," she said half defiantly; "and you look to me like one of M. de Witt's men."

"Is he alone?" asked William abruptly.

"Yes. The doctor has been and gone; he says he cannot live the night. I have been sitting with him."

"You are a good girl," said the Prince. "Now I will relieve you."

Her face brightened.

"Ah, I can go to the fair on the Plein! . . . I had promised to go—but could not, when a poor old man lay dying. . . . There are great rejoicings, are there not? . . . because of His Highness."

The Prince gave her an absent look.

"Yes, you can go—though this is no time for rejoicing, with the French on the border. Tell M. Triglandt it is his pupil come to see him."

"His pupil?" she echoed, and went lightly up the stairs.

William turned to Florent.

"I am glad the people are good to him," he said impulsively.

"He escaped from Arnheim just before the French—entered."

The girl called softly over the banisters—

"Will you come up, Mynheeren?"

They ascended the smooth, well-worn steps, and on a landing where a brass lamp burnt she pointed them to a door.

"I will go out now—not for long," she said, excusing herself. "My mother is below and our servant, and there are other lodgers."

She smiled, and with a little courtesy pattered down the stairs.

William pushed open the door.

It led into a chamber lined with cedar, and empty save for a few chairs.

Directly opposite, a second door stood open upon a bedroom full of candlelight.

The Prince went forward, but Florent hung back and remained in the unlit shadows.

William stepped breathlessly into the light. He found a lofty apartment, illumined by a row of candles set on a black bureau.

The windows were flung wide on to the summer night, the canal and the lime trees, the stars, and a great moon that hung low above the silent houses.

Close to the candles stood a blue bowl of sweet-peas and roses.

Sideways to the window was a bed curtained in patterned chintz, and on it lay an elderly man whose firm face was turned expectantly towards the door.

"Mynheer Triglandt!" exclaimed the Prince, casting down his hat and gloves.

"Your Highness!"

The words came with a deep note of joy and passion; the sick man's face utterly changed into an expression of rapture.

"Ah, why did I not know before?" William exclaimed. He came to the bedside and pulled back the curtains.

M. Triglandt held out his thin hands and grasped the Prince's.

"I have not been here long . . . Arnheim was sacked . . . they killed most . . ."

He tried to kiss the Stadtholder's hands. William prevented him and dropped on his knees beside the low bed.

"You are ill—how do I find you!"

"That your Highness should think of me! . . . It is nothing. . . . I tried to do what I could for the people, out there . . . you would not believe, the cruelties!"

William ground his teeth.

"I took the fever . . . there was not enough food. . . . They mutilated the people . . . as in Farnese's day."

The Calvinist pastor drew himself painfully up.

"I have seen our churches burnt and heard Mass sung . . ."

He gasped, and stared down into the agonised face of the young man kneeling at his bedside.

"It seemed God had turned His face from us . . . but I knew that He would raise Your Highness up to be our deliverer."

William coloured and trembled.

"That you should come here to see me," whispered M. Triglandt in a tone of infinite tenderness. "Now I shall die very glad."

"You must not die," replied the Prince. "I have so much to say. . . . How many years since we saw each other and you taught me of the ancient saints,"—he caught his breath eagerly, "and how they endured—and the true happiness they had?"

"Not so long," said the tutor. "But now Your Highness has moustaches and a sword—and is a great man." He smiled faintly. "Yet you are still like your mother. . . . I did not hope to see you again—to-night of all nights. I have heard the people shouting for the true House restored."

The Prince answered passionately—

"What is their rejoicing to me? This is rather a time for prayer . . . the country is almost lost. . . . Oh, God who hears me, almost lost!"

He pushed back the hair from his forehead and looked up into the white face of the pastor. His coldness had left him completely; he was all fire and eagerness, passion and agony.

Florent, motionless in the outer shadows, stared at him in an enthralled amazement.

"Mynheer, you used to tell me that my ancestors had been

heroes—that God had appointed them to guard His faith. . . . I want to do as they did . . . I want to save the country and the Reformed religion. . . . The odds are fearful . . . no one understands, not even Bentinck."

The suppressed emotion of years strove to express itself; but long silence had put it well-nigh beyond expression. William, speaking to the man to whom he had given his rare love, had to force the very soul of him into words.

"You know, you told me—it seemed possible I might do this thing. No one understands, if they did they would laugh; but *you* know. M. de Witt never trusted me, he thought I meant to play the traitor with France; it was the last insult—they *all* believed. You saw how utterly unhappy I was. I would have died, gladly. But now, three Provinces gone! You have heard the terms?—but never!—Not slavery again, no Romish rule for us!"

M. Triglandt looked at him with sparkling eyes.

"You have refused?"

"Yes," breathed William; "the negotiations still hang, but now I have the power—I shall refuse. Ah! *you* will not laugh at me."

He caught the sick man's hand in his cold fingers.

"I am not quick nor clever," he said, with his soul in his voice, "nor a soldier like M. de Condé nor a statesman like M. de Louvois; but I can endure, and wait, and take any hardship so that I attain my end—and do you not believe that God will help me, Mynheer Triglandt?"

"With all my soul I do believe—that He has set Your Highness in this place to be His soldier."

The pastor raised himself still higher; his haggard features glowed with an earnest rapture.

"You have before you a long and difficult task—but a holy one; you will need to be strong, and resolute, and calm—you have half Europe to hearten, half Europe to defy."

"Speak to me!" cried William. "Speak to me like that!"

The old man stared at the row of candles on the black bureau; his pale blue eyes were clear and shining.

"This is a dark hour, a time of misery, of bitterness, of despair. The tyrant triumphs; vanity, lust, and blood walk hand in hand across our land! But God, who planted in your breast this fervour, will not patiently endure the blasphemer. You can save His faith, you can raise His land from bondage, you can be the captain of His armies; you can humble the arrogant, break the power of France, and establish a freedom the world has never yet known."

He turned his luminous gaze on to the upturned face of the young Prince, who seemed to have hushed his very breath to listen.

"Your way will not be easy; there will be dangers, disappointments, sneers, oppositions, failures. You must taste humiliation, you must endure sickness, you must have great patience and great courage. When you long for peace you will be driven into the combat. Very few will understand; there will be railing, calumny—factions to be met and silenced. I see ahead down the years, and I see this: struggles, bitterness, despair—but in your heart you will know that you are the elect of God, and that you fight His battles."

There was a tense silence. Slowly, in a low voice, at last the Prince answered—

"I will try to be worthy."

He dropped his face into his hands and hid it against the coverlet. M. Triglandt lightly stroked the long brown locks.

"And I see something of your reward too. I see this land a refuge for God's people, I see them bless your name. In sickness and defeat it shall comfort you that you have so protected the Reformed religion that she shall never be in danger again; you will have opened the floodgates of liberty, and no one shall close them more."

He gasped, struggling with his breath; then his clear, inspired voice went on—

"Maybe you will die before this reward comes, maybe you will never see the result of your labours. Men may never give you the honour; but yours will be the glory if now you dare what no other man does dare—or will!"

William looked up ; his face was changed, almost distorted.

"I will do it. I am often ill, but I can put a good face on it—I shall live long enough . . . to do my task."

"People will misunderstand—you must not care—to this one thing be true. You must forego pleasure, ease, popularity, friends."

"I will do it," repeated the Prince in a choking voice. Speak to me—bless me—there is no other who understands. . . . Nevermore shall I speak to any as now I speak to you . . . to—you—who leave me."

"What more can I say? Your own soul will guide you. Be tolerant, be just, be true to your word, be patient and be brave."

"I will not falter—I will not despair—even though I go forth alone and never reach the goal." The Prince's voice failed him ; he covered his face and his shoulders heaved.

M. Triglandt lay back on the white, fragrant pillows.

"I can speak no more," he said faintly. "You know the way."

William spoke without raising his head—

"Stay with me a little—for I love you."

"William."

"Ah, Heaven pity me, I am so lonely !"

"God—God has set you apart."

The Prince looked up ; the hazel eyes were full of tears.

"I will be resolute—I will be calm—only if you could stay."

"I am dying ; but you will not forget me nor how—I spoke."

The tears ran down the young man's cheeks ; he trembled violently.

"I love you—no one else—I think. If you could stay—and see—how I obey you."

The pastor smiled faintly.

"I am very happy."

William caught his hands.

"Mynheer Triglandt," he cried in a tone of terror, "I

am afraid! Can I do it? They all look to me—to save them. M. de Witt passes on to me his hopeless task—to save them!"

He cowered against the bed.

"I feel as if my soul fainted—but I will not fail them. Ah, heart, heart!"

"God will inspire you," gasped the pastor. "He—alone."

"I trust in Him; if He should try me with bitternesses I will try to submit—but sometimes—— Yesterday I saw an old man on the Rhine—struggling with a barge—and as it advanced a little it was swept back; and he strove again—and once more gained an inch—and was driven back; and as I watched he made a little desperate headway. My affairs are even as that poor man's—I must strive and strive, and be content if with much labour I gain a little."

He staggered to his feet and bent low over the pillow.

"What can I do for you?" he whispered. He was sobbing bitterly.

"Nothing—do not weep."

The old man caught his coat and arm.

"I am content," he said. "I dreamt of this—when M. de Witt divided us because I taught you who you were."

There fell a soft, meaning silence. There could be heard the faint peal of the joy-bells coming through the summer dark . . .

William supported the old man in a trembling embrace.

M. Triglandt caught one of the loose curls that hung over the Prince's shoulder and pressed it to his lips . . . then his hands clasped tightly on his breast.

He nodded like one falling asleep.

Then suddenly his eyes opened wide.

"Say—'God bless you,'" sobbed the Prince desperately.

"God bless you—God be with you always."

He gathered sudden energy; he smiled and raised his right hand.

"Thou art King, O God; send help unto Jacob. Through Thee will we overthrow our enemies, and in Thy name will

we tread them under that rise up against us ; for we will not trust in our bow."

The dying man's voice swelled with exaltation—

"It is not our sword that shall help us ; but it is *Thou* who savest us from our enemies and putteth them to confusion that hate us . . ."

He fell into soft, yet triumphant accents—

"We will make our boast of . . . God . . . all day long . . . and will . . . praise Thy name . . . for ever."

His hand sank.

"William . . . my child . . ."

M. Triglandt closed his eyes . . . his breath was almost stilled.

Outside the joy-bells rang, and the Stadtholder cast himself across the homely bed in a passionate agony of bitter tears.

"God—be merciful—to me—a sinner—and alone !"

CHAPTER VIII

THE STADTHOLDER

A HEAVY mist of sun-filled vapour lay over the camp at Bodegraven.

The vivid green meadows lay flat to the dun-coloured sky. A white cottage with painted shutters, a vine-covered porch, and a garden full of sweet-peas and roses, poppies and herbs, stood by a clump of alders amid the tents and pickets.

Above it floated the Orange flag. In one of its small rooms the young Stadtholder sat, his elbow on the table, his brow in his hand.

M. de Zuylestein and William Bentinck stood by the open window; and Florent Van Mander was speaking with a force and an energy to which he had never before been roused.

"If Your Highness would consider."

His Highness would consider nothing. Cornelius Triglandt had died in his arms at dawn that day, and already time was closing over the event—but not over the pain.

Van Mander addressed himself to the two gentlemen in the window embrasure.

"I swear to you these overtures were made to me in Zeyst. Will you take no heed of them?"

M. de Zuylestein frowned.

"What you say amounts to this—that some agents of King Louis have broached to you a scheme for the assassination of His Highness."

Van Mander answered firmly—

"I journeyed straight to the Hague to inform the Prince—I have had till now no opportunity of speaking."

Inwardly he was referring to the past night. He could have cried out the great pride and joy he felt in serving a Prince who had revealed himself at the death-bed of Cornelius Triglandt, a master whom he knew at last.

He longed to prove his devotion, to die for the Prince and the country. He burned with shame when he recalled that he had once tampered with France.

"Madame Lavalette is at the bottom of it . . ."

He continued his narration.

"And one Hyacinthe St. Croix. . . . She hath a spite against His Highness. . . . M. de Louvois thinks there could be no greater disaster to the country than the loss of the Prince. . . . They approached me—" he paused, "because I had formerly dealings with St. Croix," he added with an effort.

The Stadtholder raised swollen eyes.

"Let it be," he said wearily.

M. Bentinck interrupted—

"Sir, you must take some notice of this plot."

"It is beneath me to consider my own safety," said William in the same tone.

Van Mander approached the table earnestly.

"This is deep—there is one Michael Tichelaer in it—a Dutch barber; a higher name than his——"

"I will not hear it," replied the Prince with impatience.

"This is mere bravado," exclaimed M. de Zuylestein.

"We have other things to occupy us," replied the Prince.

"Sir," declared Van Mander ardently, "I must insist that you listen to me. . . . Once more the French will send you terms . . . should you again refuse them—they have resolved to compass your death."

The Stadtholder was still indifferent.

"These plots are hatched against every man of position."

"There is danger at home as well as in the French camp," insisted Florent. "A great name was mentioned."

"Whose?" asked M. Bentinck eagerly.

"That of M. Cornelius de Witt."

The Prince looked up sharply, roused at length by this.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed.

"I spoke with the fellow he had confided in," Van Mander answered; "this Michael Tichelaer, who saw him soon after Your Highness was proclaimed in Dordt. . . . He was very precise: M. de Witt railed against Your Highness, said you would marry a foreign Princess and make yourself absolute in the United Provinces—and to prevent this and to bring the republicans back to power he desired this Tichelaer to go to the camp and kill Your Highness——"

The Stadtholder interrupted.

"I believe none of it."

M. Bentinck, however, was not so sure.

"At least investigate the story."

But all further speech was arrested by the announcement of the expected envoys from the Allies.

M. de Zuylestein drew Van Mander aside.

"I will see you afterwards; your tale requires looking into—particularly as regards M. de Witt. The Prince is too rash."

It was Sir Gabriel Sylvius who brought the final answer from King Louis; the terms that William III. hoped, through the intervening influence of the English, might prove more reasonable.

Sir Gabriel was accompanied by Mr. Jermyn and an Englishman very different from either Buckingham or Arlington, Sir Edward Seymour, of the proudest name in the three kingdoms.

The young Stadtholder received them with perfect composure; all trace of weariness left his manner.

"Your Highness," began Sir Gabriel, "I bring to you the final conditions of peace of the Kings of France and England."

He handed the Prince a letter.

"I would advise Your Highness not to look at it till you have dined—I fear it will not please you."

William swept a glance over the assembled faces, then tore open the envelope.

It contained a letter from the two English Ministers, and a copy of a treaty recently drawn up at Heeswyck between Charles and Louis, in which the two monarchs agreed to press their demands in concert and not to enter into any separate treaty with the Republic, whom they thus hoped to reduce to extremity.

Turning from this document, which destroyed all his hopes of detaching Charles from the French alliance, William cast his eyes over the Articles of Peace.

They stood the same as before, save that to the haughty demands of France were added the immoderate claims of England.

A passionate colour rushed into the young Stadtholder's thin cheek.

He gave a stifled exclamation, and for a second it seemed as if he would tear the papers across and fling them in the face of the envoys who had brought them.

But he controlled himself, and made a movement as if he would have thrust them into the breast of his coat, forgetting he wore a cuirass.

Recollecting himself he flung the documents down on the table.

"Your Highness,"—Sir Edward addressed him, coming forward—"we are directed to ask for your answer, and the answer of the States, within ten days."

William looked at him, and saw a high-bred gentleman, handsome and proud, with languid brown eyes; and dressed richly in a murrey-coloured travelling costume.

"You are Sir Edward Seymour?" queried the Stadtholder.

The Englishman bowed.

"Why are you sent here, Sir Edward?" demanded William. "Sir Gabriel could have brought the dispatch alone."

The bluntness of this slightly discomposed Sir Edward's stateliness.

He made a little motion with his riding-whip towards the Dutch nobles—

"These are in Your Highness' confidence?"

"Oh, say what you have to say, Sir Edward," cried the Prince impatiently.

Seymour was considering him curiously.

"My lord Buckingham made an offer to Your Highness——"

"Which I refused."

"—in the hope of detaching the English from the French alliance," added Sir Edward. "You now see, Sir, that such a hope is useless."

"Well?"

"It is my embassy to repeat that offer to Your Highness. To show the consideration in which their Majesties hold you—they again offer you the sovereignty of Holland—in exchange for the towns not yet in King Louis' possession."

William III. looked at him straightly.

"I thank you and your master for these proposals," he said coldly, "but they are renewed twenty-four hours too late. . . . Yesterday I took an oath of fidelity to the States as Stadtholder. . . . You have my answer."

Sir Edward bowed.

"I may remind Your Highness that you stand in a desperate—almost a hopeless—position."

The Prince answered proudly—

"I am not by nature timorous, Sir Edward, and do not fear to have to fight for liberty."

"Have you well considered——"

William interrupted—

"Sir, I would rather spend the rest of my life hunting on one of my German estates than sell my country for any price that could be offered."

Sir Edward was not as Buckingham, nor even as Arlington; he bowed again, this time with an air of respect.

Every one was silent, holding himself with reserve.

The slanting ray of sun that fell through the open lattice window, laden with the scent of the roses and sweet-peas, seemed incongruous with this contained and grave assembly.

The Prince turned about as if considering something. They

felt that he was going to speak, and waited for it. Seymour regarded him keenly, with the air of a man who knows and values what he sees.

The Stadtholder paused by the table, and rested his beautiful hand upon the papers his messenger had brought.

"You shall have an answer in less than ten days," he said. "I will take these terms myself to the Assembly——"

He paused, and drew himself erect with something of an effort; his reddened eyes flashed with an intense expression of dauntless defiance.

He spoke again, and with irresistible force—

"The King of France considers it a fine amusement to ruin an unoffending country—he thinks it will be easy to crush a petty Prince. You, my lords, doubtless pity me my vain resistance—but you know not what you smile at. The French insult us with outrageous terms. Not Cæsar to the Gauls, nor Alexander to the Persians was more haughty; but we are not as Darius—France will repent this insolence. We will, from this little spark, blow up a war shall see Europe in arms and shake the Continent! No peace, they say; but they shall come to sue for it, be it thirty years or fifty years hence! There is a force can hold back Condé's blood-flushed cavalry and keep in check the battalions Turenne leads; there is a strength can pit itself against these servitors of the Pope and match itself against the pride of France; and from this conquered land it springs. Long and bloody the struggle may be that forces the aggressor back across his frontier; but it will break his pride, and he shall come to wish that he had taken our honourable terms—for, by my soul! as I am Captain of my country's hopes, and of their faith the Protector, I shall not sheathe the sword until this presuming arrogance is tamed and Europe breathes in liberty!

"We are not vanquished yet! Though they reckon we are beneath their heel, yet we will show them otherwise. We are no nation of weaklings, nor am I a puppet ruler.

"I am the guardian of this Republic, and I will be worthy of the charge—so help me God!

"My lords, there is no more to say."

A long minute's stillness followed. Then Sir Edward Seymour spoke.

"I do not trespass on my duty if I say that I admire the temper that Your Highness shows; I should be pleased to be as fortunate as King Louis, but better pleased to be as courageous as Your Highness."

"Thank you, my lord," answered William. "I hope that we may meet again under fairer conditions."

He held out his hand and Sir Edward kissed it, bowed, very courtly, and withdrew, followed by M. St. Jermyn, his suite, and the Dutch nobles who formed his escort.

The Stadtholder, coughing, turned to the mantelpiece and put his hand over his aching eyes.

"Bentinck, I must return to the Hague—at once."

"With these dispatches?"

"Yes—the States must assemble——"

M. Zuylestein stepped forward—

"This assassination plot——"

"Can I think of that—now?"

"M. Cornelius de Witt is involved——"

"I do not believe it." This impatiently, with a frown.

Florent Van Mander came from the window embrasure and went on one knee on the red-tiled floor.

William looked at him and hesitated to speak harshly.

This young man seemed to him a link with the past night; he had been witness of his tears . . .

William bit his under-lip and listened.

Florent told his story hurriedly but clearly. Madame Lavalette, under the guise of a traveller from Brussels, accompanied by St. Croix and Michael Tichelaer as her servants, was to take up her quarters in some village near the Prince's camp . . .

Florent broke off.

He looked at M. Zuylestein.

William was not attending.

"The matter is serious!" cried Van Mander desperately.

The Stadtholder did not seem to know that the narrative had ceased.

"Highness," said M. Bentinck.

William was looking at the dispatches on the table.

"I will hear it presently," he said.

"Presently may be too late——"

Florent was again interrupted.

A messenger from the Hague with a letter from M. de Witt.

The Prince flushed at sight of the writing, and was breaking the seal when an officer entered to say that a private messenger from King Charles desired a secret audience of the Prince.

William cast down the letter and listened eagerly.

It had always been his passionate hope to detach his uncle from the King of France.

"Who was it?"

"A Frenchman, who had his passport and credentials and had shown them to Count Struym."

The Stadtholder would see him—at once. He turned all save Bentinck from the room, he knew that Charles liked to act under a mask of secrecy.

"Though you may," smiled William, "listen at the window."

He was all animation, hope, and eagerness. If Charles should come to secret terms the Republic was saved.

Florent, very pale, still urged his interrupted tale—

"This may be the very man!"

"Afterwards," said William,—“afterwards!”

The messenger was introduced; a Frenchman of commonplace exterior, his demeanour very humble. The Stadtholder, alone with him save for M. Bentinck, spoke with impetuous frankness.

"What does my uncle want of me? I will do anything consistent with my vows to the Republic."

Arlington had sent an extraordinary proposal. Lord Halifax was in the King's confidence, he said, and was now in Holland. . . . Would the Prince meet him, unknown to the French—secretly?

William gave an immediate consent, but Bentinck interrupted.

"You are dangerously rash, Highness; this man's tale is strange, and his errand still stranger for a Frenchman to have come upon. Sir Edward Seymour gave you no hint of this."

But the Prince was dazzled by the bait.

"I can refuse no chance of coming to an agreement with King Charles."

He turned to the messenger, but before his first word the door was opened and Florent Van Mander entered, his hand on his sword and his face resolute.

"Sir, that man is Hyacinthe St. Croix—a tool of M. de Pomponne—a spy of M. de Louvois—an assassin!"

St. Croix saw himself betrayed by a man whom he had been very sure of; his face lowered with the rage of it, but he had his answer.

"Does Your Highness allow your private business to be thus interrupted?"

The Stadtholder looked from one to another. M. Bentinck came nearer to him.

"This is the plot of which I warned Your Highness—the attempt to get you into the power of your enemies—to compass your death!" cried Florent hotly.

St. Croix affected to sneer.

"I do not know the man—will Your Highness listen to these children's tales——?"

"Do not know me?—I have some letters of yours."

William marked St. Croix' expression.

"By your leave, Monsieur," he said, "I will look into this."

The Frenchman saw the game was up; he seized his last, flying chance . . .

Quick his little, keen dagger was out, and he made a swift movement to thrust it above the armlet of the Prince's cuirass; there, where, by a little unguarded space, the heart might be reached.

Florent threw himself upon him . . .

With a passionate sound of rage against the stolid Hollander who had roused at last, St. Croix turned. There was a second's struggle ; the sunlight winked along the steel . . .

Florent pitched over backwards with closed eyes and an open mouth ; St. Croix tore the door wide and fled.

The thing had not taken two minutes—it was less than ten since St. Croix had entered the room.

The Prince and William Bentinck caught Van Mander.

"He was right !" cried William fiercely ; "the man was one of Louvois' spies."

"Murderers," said M. Bentinck ; "he has stabbed the fellow."

The handle of the dagger, silver and ivory, stuck out horribly from the breast of Florent Van Mander, who gasped thickly and beat his heels on the tiles.

"Ah, poor fool," muttered William, supporting him, "he was saving me. After the Frenchman, Bentinck !"

Florent clutched at the dagger-hilt with convulsive fingers.

"Take care—M. de Witt—Tichelaer——" He struggled ; but the Prince, for all his frail look, supported him easily enough.

"I am sorry for this," he said. "I am sorry."

Florent Van Mander, selfish place-seeker, careless of his country, and in the pay of France once, has died for a sentiment of honour in the Stadtholder's arms, even as last night he had seen Cornelius Triglandt die . . .

Can William of Orange so inspire one man?—then he may so inspire a whole nation with the last desperate courage. If Florent Van Mander will die for him there will be others also reckless of their lives if they may serve Nassau by laying them down . . .

It is calling to horse now, riding to and fro, excitement rising up, reined in. . . . The last defiance has been flung to France ! . . . The States must refuse these terms . . .

The Stadtholder thrusts the dispatches and the letter from M. de Witt, unopened, into the pocket of his mantle, mounts his grey horse and spurs off for the Hague.

The last rays of the sun that peep over the tiger-lilies and

sweet-peas at the dead face of Florent Van Mander shine also in the harness of the Stadtholder and his suite, as they ride along the smooth road, between the canals, the locks where the water-lilies rest, the deep, thick-grown meadows where the cattle graze, the little homes with the coloured shutters, the thatched windmills, the poplars and alders, the low fields where the storks sit, through the silent twilight towards the Hague.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE ASSEMBLY

IN the old Palace of the Princes of Orange, that had been the dwelling of the Counts of Holland when the Hague was merely their hunting estate, and now for twenty years the meeting-place for the Government of John de Witt, Their High Mightinesses, the States, were assembled.

The sunshine filled the great chamber, showing the tapestry on the walls, the marble chimney-pieces, the painted ceiling, in the full dazzle of their gorgeous colours.

In the centre, within a space enclosed by a balustrade, sat the nobles and the Deputies of eighteen towns.

At the end of the table at which they sat stood the Grand Pensionary's chair—empty during a debate for the first time in twenty years.

Behind this chair were the benches, filled by the councillor deputies; next them a table belonging to the Deputies of Haarlem, Delft, Leyden, and Brill.

Opposite were the tables belonging to Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Gouda, Gorcum, Schiedam, and Schoonhoven.

Either side the western fireplace sat the secretaries of the towns, and directly facing them was the raised velvet arm-chair of the Stadtholder.

An air of expectancy and gloom lay over the whole Assembly. The white, anxious faces of the States were in sharp contrast to the peaceful scene visible through the fine tall windows; the sparkling water of the Vyver, the swans sailing round their green islands, the stately avenues of chestnuts and elms beyond.

Every one in the chamber was looking at the Stadtholder.

He stood on the step before his chair and held the dispatches brought him yesterday by Sir Gabriel Sylvius. He wore the habit he had travelled in : cuirass, high boots, dark velvet, and a purple scarf.

He wore his beaver with the long black plume ; across his chair were thrown mantle and gloves.

His bright glance swept the silent, agitated faces turned towards him. He opened the dispatches and read the terms of France :—

“Possession of all the towns of the Republic in Brabant and Flanders—the frontiers of the United Provinces to be withdrawn as far as the river Leek—this leaving Guelders, Beteuse, and Loevenstein in the hands of France.

“Overyssel to be given to the Bishop of Munster. Rynberg to be ceded to the Elector of Cologne. Delfyzl and its dependencies to be ceded to the King of England.

“Crevecœur, Hertogenbosch, and Maestricht to be handed over to the French.

“The Catholic religion to be freely allowed in the States.

“The revocation of all edicts hurtful to French commerce.

“The Dutch East and West India companies to submit to the French companies ; a separate treaty on this matter to be concluded in three months.

“Free passage and passport for any subject of France.

“An indemnity of war, the tribute of 12,000,000 florins.

“A formal embassy to be sent every year to France, to present the King with a gold medal as token of homage ; the motto on it to be a humble thanksgiving for His Majesty’s mercy in leaving the United Provinces some liberty.”

William paused, and again looked round the States.

“These are the final terms of France,” he said. “You have heard them before, my lords—they are not softened nor abated, and to them now are added these, which His Majesty of France demands for the King of England.”

Consternation and anguish showed in every face.

The senators of Rotterdam were weeping. Some sat rigid,

with clasped hands and fixed eyes; others drooped with hanging heads, bowed by the bitterness of this humiliation.

No one spoke.

The Prince read from the next page—

"This, demanded on behalf of the King of England, in consideration of the treaty of Heeswyck, whereby the King of France is resolved to accept no peace if the King of England is not satisfied with his claims.

"First the salute of the flag, even from an entire Dutch fleet to a single British vessel.

"Satisfaction in Surinam.

"The extradition of political refugees.

"1,000,000 pounds for the expenses of the war, 400,000 in the following October, the remainder in six annual instalments of 100,000.

"A rent of 100,000 pounds for the herring fishery.

"The sovereignty of the remaining portion of the United Provinces for the Prince of Orange, as reigning and hereditary King.

"A new treaty of commerce, relative to the Indies.

"The surrender of Sluys, Walcheren, Cadzant, Goree, and Voorne as guarantee."

The Stadtholder raised his head and once more surveyed the Assembly.

"My name is mentioned here—not my friends but my enemies desire for me this infamous honour. . . . France and England have had my answer—what do *you* say, my lords?"

He sat down, still looking at them, grave, reserved, and stern.

The States remained dumb and helpless; they dare not decide. The utter bitterness and hopelessness of their situation robbed them of their courage and their resolution. They felt themselves already slaves; they saw their country already a province of France. They were mute, and in most eyes the tears glittered.

Gaspard Fagel rose. He pressed for the opinion of His Highness. . . . The States flung themselves on the wisdom and valour of His Highness . . . the people had elected him to be their Captain and guide.

"Most noble lords," answered the Stadtholder, "your decision is required."

They joined in persuading him to give his advice; they turned to him desperately as the one spark of hope in all the black prospect.

He rose again.

The sun was streaming through the window at his side, and made a star in his cuirass; the little silver-gilt chains round his ankles, that held his spurs over the soft riding-boots, gave a pleasant clink as he moved.

He held his left hand on the great basket-work hilt of his sword, and his right on the scarf across his breast.

"Your Noble Mightinesses ask for my advice. I will say to you what I know you all have in your hearts.

"There is but one answer to these terms—the coldest, most contemptuous refusal.

"Who but an abject wretch would subscribe to such conditions while he had breath in his body?

"By Heaven! I would rather be torn to pieces than consent to any such humiliation and shame."

A stir ran through the Assembly.

"I do not despair," continued the Stadtholder passionately. "Though we seem reduced to desperate extremity, yet is our case not hopeless if we make our answer to France sword in hand. . . . To die honourably is better than a miserable safety. . . . It is not possible for us to be the slaves of France. My lords, you will reject these shameful conditions."

They sat mute. They had placed their fortunes between his hands; he was the master of their destiny—the destiny of the United Provinces.

Most of them were learned men of much experience who had been long in office; all of them were older than the man they looked to, by many years.

He and they could remember when he was a mere name in the State, the prisoner of Their Noble Mightinesses. Some of them had slighted, all ignored him.

Yet now this young man's voice, calm, decisive above the

tumult and the anguish, swayed them all. They caught desperately at his words, and trusted themselves to the power of his dominant will.

For he alone stood resolute and undaunted before such dire straits as could cause the guardians of the State to weep aloud.

He spoke again. If he had been schooled to silence all his life he did not lack expression now, nor a natural eloquence and passionate force.

Some of the fire that animated him crept into his listeners' hearts; they could not listen to him and still despair.

"Are ye afraid of war? What greater ills can it bring than this peace that makes us slaves?"

"Is your trust in God so little that ye fear He will forsake us?"

"This is not our downfall, but rather the downfall of the French. They, intoxicated with success, have refused the concessions we made them; and now they shall have no concessions, but lose all they ever gained.

"We have still enough men to defend the frontiers of Holland; Spain and Brandenburg hasten to our aid.

"Break off these negotiations, my lords! They degrade us and dishearten our allies. Shall we feed the pride of France by considering these high mounting terms?"

"By my honour, there is nothing I would not rather do than subscribe to such a peace as this offered us!"

"Sooner would I be an exile at the Elector's court, dependent on his bounty, than be a King at the instance of France.

"My lords, I have no fear that I shall fail. God, who set apart Samson and raised up Gideon to smite the Midianitish host, will strengthen me.

"Even if the country goes—even if we lose the United Provinces—our Faith is stronger than our country and may survive it. If we are the only people in Europe true to the pure Church, still may we save her from the tyranny and corruption of the enemy. There is another land, a wider continent, where we may worship in peace and live un-

molested ; where we may raise another Amsterdam as rich as this. As we have built our cities here on land reclaimed from the sea, so may we build others there in the wilderness.

"My noble lords, in your ports is shipping sufficient to carry two hundred thousand people to our colonies.

"In the Indian Archipelago we may rear other churches in which the Mass will never be heard, and found another commonwealth in which liberty will be secure.

"Even if we are driven from Europe, in Asia we may still seek a refuge. This were better than submission ; but first, there is one ally to whom we may turn for aid."

He paused, breathing a little hurriedly, and flung off his hat as if it irked him.

His composed, inspired, and courageous face was fully visible now to the States gazing at him. His eyes clear, bright and unflinching as an eagle's, took in the Assembly at a glance.

No one wept now.

Enthusiasm rose high, swelled, and gathered. They began to forget that they had ever despaired. The weakest was braced by inward fire, the throb of pride, the uplift of patriotism and piety.

The Prince smiled.

"One ally," he repeated, "who saved us once before."

He loosened his grip on his sword, and the gilt steel slipped with a rattle.

"The sea," he said, "the sea !"

A sound like a muffled sob broke from the Assembly.

Some of the Deputies rose to their feet.

M. Beuningen hid his face in his hands, and his shoulders shook.

"My noble lords," said the Stadtholder, "we can open the dykes."

The burgomaster of the famous city of Amsterdam held out his hand.

"I will answer for Amsterdam, Your Highness !"

"You know what it will mean," returned the Prince. "Ruin

to many—villas, farms, pleasure gardens buried beneath the water—a sacrifice! I ask no light thing of you—but is it not better than foreign dominion?"

"We will set the example," cried the burgomaster of Amsterdam.

The Deputies of Rotterdam and Gouda spoke in voices dry and choked—

"Our vote for that—rejection of the terms of France—and cut the dykes!"

William coloured brightly.

"Our troops are within the province of Holland, which will be turned into an island; but many of the enemy are on low ground, and nothing but a swift retreat will save them—they do not suspect us of this desperate course and will be utterly unprepared. I have the reports of the superintendents of the dykes. . . . A complete inundation would take five days, . . . When King Louis receives our refusal of his terms he will march immediately on Amsterdam and the Hague—and I see no way but to perish or open the sluices."

He stooped and pulled some papers from the pocket of his mantle.

"M. de Witt suggested this at the beginning of the war as a possible resort—he had instructions drawn up and reports made—we thank his foresight that there is much done. There must be no delay now.

"I know the objections; what many of the magistrates will say. The hay stands, the corn is uncut, the cattle will starve without pasturage, the waters becoming foul may cause the plague—I have thought of it all.

"But there is no other way.

"Better be at the mercy of the sea than at the mercy of the French.

"This price we must pay for our liberty."

"My noble lords, I leave you to deliberate on what I have said. As you are patriots and believers, you will sacrifice yourselves to your fatherland and your faith, than which no nobler things to die for can be found."

The dusky-coloured sunlight rested on his face and covered his slight figure in its appointments of war; it picked him out against the background of dark panelling and gleamed dimly in his cuirass.

His eyes were solemn but his lips smiled proudly.

The Assembly stirred and breathed—

“Open the sluices; cut the dykes!”

CHAPTER X

THE VICTOR VANQUISHED

THE Duke of Monmouth and the King's brother were playing tennis in the green courtyard of Zeyst.

Near them, close to a wall bright with coloured roses, walked Madame Lavalette and the Marquis de Pomponne.

She wore a habit like a gentleman's military coat, blue, braided with silver, and a beaver with a plume of feathers azure as her eyes; her long skirt brushed the grass backwards into a resemblance to ruffled velvet as she stepped.

In her hands was a riding-whip that she bent across the stiff skirts of her coat.

"Marquis," she said, "Monsieur Cornelius de Witt has been arrested."

"I heard—last night."

"Well?"

She looked at him searchingly.

"Well?" he echoed, and smiled.

"You know the facts?"

"Scarcely, Madame."

"It is on Michael Tichelaer's accusation Monsieur de Witt has been arrested," answered the Duchess sharply.

"On the charge of a conspiracy to murder the Prince of Orange, is it not?"

"Yes."

"The attempt that failed at Bodegraven," said de Pomponne. "Well, it does not touch us."

The Duchess' whip made havoc with M. Van Odyk's roses.

"That is what I wondered," she said. "M. de Louvois does not like those he trusts to be clumsy."

"In brief, you fear a *lettre de cachet*, Madame, eh?"

The curling petals swept on to the grass from the August roses.

"We failed," said Madame Lavalette.

"Mon Dieu, yes! but St. Croix is not alive to tell tales—he was safely shot by the Dutch soldiers as he strove to escape. Sir Edward Seymour told me—he had hardly cleared the camp himself."

"There is Tichelaer."

"He has chosen his part——"

The Duchess interrupted impatiently—

"What part does he play?"

"He wishes to please the mob and ruin the de Witts—why not?—an obscure ruffian!"

"But he knows something."

De Pomponne shrugged.

"Are you afraid?"

She frowned.

"M. le Marquis, that man knows that we hired St. Croix to put the Prince of Orange out of the way." She spoke very low. "That it was M. de Louvois' scheme; and that he, Tichelaer, was to give out M. de Witt was in the plot, so as to crush the Grand Pensionary as well as the Stadtholder. Van Mander, the fool who spoilt it all, thought M. Cornelius, at least, deep in; and now—the Prince escapes, St. Croix is shot—the design fails—but Michael Tichelaer persists in his part, accuses Monsieur Cornelius, and rouses Holland against the de Witts with his false oaths."

"He hath a personal spite against Monsieur Cornelius—that is why we selected him——"

Again she broke in—

"What if he says a little more?—if he declares M. de Louvois hatched this scheme, and that you and I were his agents?"

"He will not."

"You think so?"

"Mon Dieu, yes! We paid him well; and what object would he serve? He poses as a patriot, remember, and finds himself very popular; he would not care to admit he tampered with us. Besides, it would damage his fabrications against M. de Witt."

"Then—we are safe?"

"From Michael Tichelaer."

"M. de Louvois would never forgive us if it got blown abroad he was at the bottom of this."

They walked for a way in silence; then the Duchess spoke again—

"And Monsieur Cornelius?"

De Pomponne raised his eyebrows.

"It seems to me that there is not much hope for M. Cornelius. Some such excuse as this was only needed to give a vent to the popular fury against him and his brother—can you imagine a better one? He has tried to murder the young hero of the moment! No, there is no escape for M. de Witt."

"They will discover this man Tichelaer's falsehoods."

"The Dutch are not in the humour to be just."

She fingered her whip.

"And no one knows the truth save ourselves?"

"No one."

She laughed, rather desperately.

"We shall not speak!"

"I think—no!"

"Mon Dieu!" sighed the Duchess, "I recall the younger de Witt; if ever a man was a saint he is one."

"He will meet with a saint's fate, I do not doubt, Madame."

"Unless His Majesty reaches the Hague in time to save him from the mob," returned the Duchess; "the King would be generous. When shall we be at the Hague, Monsieur le Marquis?"

"In two—three days."

Monmouth came running across the grass towards them.

He was flushed and panting.

He flung down his racquet and got into his crimson coat.

"Did you see my lord Arlington?—passed by but now—"

such a face! La! something amiss.—You Frenchmen are too deep for us, Marquess.—The Duke of Orleans plays a good game—I'd like to race him, he is very light."

He paused, and suddenly laughed in a wholly pleasant, conciliating way he had.

"You play yourself out of breath," said Madame Lavalette, speaking in the soft tone all women used to Lord Monmouth.

"Save me!" he cried, "but it is a question of politics—I swear it, Madame, I was not meant for a statesman.—Here comes my lord Bucks.—He is very clever, Marquess, but though he made a war nearly as easily as he writes verses—he does not find making a peace as easy as playing the fiddle."

At this his idle eye was caught by the roses and the drifting petals beneath them.

"Ah, Madame, you have slain the flowers—cruel! I would like to stick them together again—roses are rare in Holland, Madame, and the summer is nearly over."

He gave her his sweet smile, and she answered it by one slightly mocking.

"Your Grace is very deceptive—you talk like Sir Calydor and look like the Red Cross Knight—but I fear you are but a worthless rogue after all."

"I vow," he replied, "I have been absolved from all my sins.—I carry with me," he touched his breast, "the document by which His Majesty pardons me all murders committed before this May—absolved and pardoned!—See, a fine butterfly!—Could I scale this wall with my hands tied, think you?—Madame, do you love wrestling?—Ah, sure, George is purely annoyed."

And he pointed to Buckingham, coming across the smooth, level turf towards them.

De Pomponne went to meet him.

Buckingham laughed.

"The terms rejected!" he said.

"Rejected?"

"M. de Louvois has the news."

De Pomponne was surprised.

"In what manner is the refusal sent?"

"The most contemptuous possible—the Prince deigns no answer at all, but merely sends a copy of the resolution of the States by which the proposals of peace are rejected."

"Insolence!" exclaimed the Marquis.

Buckingham smiled sourly.

"Louvois is furious, of course—this defiance is unlooked for." He laughed again.

He was fast tiring of his last hobby of politics. The Dutch war had lost its novelty, and the attempt to seduce the Prince of Orange disgusted by reason of its failure. He was tired of the sights of war; and Whitehall, which had lately sated him, appeared again delightful to the Duke's changeful mind.

The matter was more serious for M. de Pomponne.

"M. de Louvois was furious?"

"Absolutely."

"And the King?"

"Surprised too, I think—they are in conclave now."

"I will go in.—I suppose we shall march on the Hague at once?"

"The Hague?" repeated Buckingham. "It is the most beautiful village in the world—I hope His Majesty will not burn it, Marquis."

Monmouth approached, his racquet in his hand, all eagerness for the news.

"Peace rejected—war to be continued!"

The thoughtless soldier is pleased: his quick fancy sees the green tennis-court, the roses, the placid sky exchanged again for the charge of the cavalry, the attack on the bastions, the English flags against the smoke of the noisy cannon.

He sees himself commended, flattered, praised by the great King, complimented by the great Condé again, as he was before the trenches of Nymwegen.

He catches up his hat, and slips his arm through my lord Buckingham's blue velvet sleeve; laughing together they go into the castle.

The Marquis and Madame Lavalette follow; the tennis-

court stands empty ; the rose-petals drift over the smooth grass and cling in the nets.

A wind rises, and it is chilly for an August twilight.

The sun sets behind the flat, misty horizon in a dun and blood-coloured vapour ; the camp-fires of the French, which may be seen from the towers of Amsterdam, spring up in the low meadows.

Other lights, softer, more delicate, appear in the windows of the castle.

A ball is to be given in the great rooms looking on to the ramparts.

The sentries keeping watch hear the music of the *contre danse* falling through the silent air.

M. de Rochfort is expected with his cavalry regiments—has been expected all day. He does not come ; the King is a little vexed.

He has become of late impatient if every hour does not bring a fresh triumph . . .

My lord Monmouth steps the minuet as well as he wrestles or runs ; he dances till the moon sets.

There is much talk of the coming conquest, of the balls to be held in the Orange Saloon, and in the winter on the ice—a novelty !

His Majesty will return to Saint Germain after his entry into the Hague ; but he will come back in the winter for these new festivities.

Tales are told of the wealth of Amsterdam. Her meanest streets make the proudest walks of London and of Paris appear paltry ; her houses are like palaces.

Buckingham was amazed at the Hague ; the width of the roads, the height of the houses, the avenues of trees, the wealthy shops. . .

This is a conquest worth the making.

So they dance to the dawn.

As it grows light, Monmouth leaves the castle.

He has his quarters at another château not far distant, and as he steps out on to the ramparts he lingers a little to watch the dawn.

My lord is twenty-five, and full of joyous life. He can take as much pleasure in watching the sun rise as in a brawl in Whitefriars. He can stick a man through and never think of it again, but he listens to a little bird singing in a lonely fashion and would not harm it for another dukedom.

He lingers, dallying with the cool loveliness of the moment. He sets his elbows on the battlements, and leans on the stone, where blush-roses trail as beautiful as himself, and he looks over the expanse of half-revealed country lying beneath him.

As the sun brightens it glimmers in a curious streak of silver, there on the horizon.

My lord is a little puzzled. Were it not that his reason tells him it is impossible he would think he saw water—saw the distant line of the sea.

He wraps his grey mantle round his brocaded ball-dress and leaves the castle, saluted by the silent sentinels.

He has missed his friends.

A sudden silence succeeds the gaiety of the night.

He crosses the moat and enters the meadows; the air is unaccountably cool. He follows the raised causeway between the thick grass, crosses a bridge over a canal, and stops, amazed.

The meadow before him is flooded; spikes of grass and branches of trees rise from placid grey water.

"The river has overflowed," thinks Monmouth—yet there has been no rain.

He follows the causeway hastily. The next field is under water, and the next under water. It seems to him it rises; as he watches a clump of alders, high enough, are nearly submerged.

The duke stops and stares about him.

The brightening sun discloses a cottage buried to the roof beneath the water.

The camp!

Monmouth turns about quickly. The tents are on higher ground—but this—it is a flood . . .

He hesitates, daunted and dismayed

The water is certainly rising ; now it is lapping against the causeway—soon it will cover it.

Monmouth retraces his steps, turns towards the camp. He has to cross a corner of one of the meadows ; here the water is over his ankles, his light shoes are soaked, his finery wetted.

Bewilderment and terror clutch at his heart ; he quickens his steps along the cobbled pathway.

The canal is one with the fields now ; a swirling current hurries against the trees. Monmouth stops again ; the sun sparkles on the gleam of harness ; a drowned horse—a soldier's horse is swept against a clump of willow.

Beyond—another glitter and something blue. . . . A man.

Monmouth bends over, pulling aside the tangled grasses and leaves.

He stares down into the dead face of a French soldier.

A soldier in the brilliant uniform of M. de Rochfort's regiment.

With a little exclamation the Duke drops to his knees.

He reaches his hand into the water and carries it to his lips. Salt !

His wild surmise is confirmed. He gives a quick cry—

“The sea ! the sea !”

Suddenly the French trumpets break into the stillness ; they proclaim alarm, confusion, terror, a retreat . . .

The water is rising ; covering the causeway.

The gleaming cuirass and blue uniform are tangled in the alders ; the soldier's head jerks as if he heard the trumpet-call.

My lord gets to his feet. His mantle slips back from his splendid dress ; he claps his hand to his sword, though no sword shall avail against this . . .

The grass, the weeds, the trunks of the trees disappear.

Drifting wreckage floats by : a beam, a hat, a French colour . . .

As my lord hurries, the water on the causeway is over his feet.

“My God !” he cries. “They have opened the sluices and let in the sea !—They have cut the dykes, and let in the sea !”

CHAPTER XI

THE FALLEN STATESMAN

THE courage and resolution of one man had saved the country from the conquest that would have terminated her existence.

The sea swept back the invaders. Heroism, springing from extremity, had by a great outburst of patriotism preserved the liberty of the United Provinces and raised the Protestant Faith to a security it would never lose again.

It had taken five days to cut the dykes; Amsterdam had set the example. The wealthiest merchants were the first to dismantle their pleasure gardens, their picture galleries, their splendid country villas; farms were razed to the ground and turned into fortifications, the mills alone being spared.

Many thousands of guilders were voted by the town council for the carrying out of the inundations. Every one helped; arms, food, powder, were taken into the town.

The great city stood almost impregnable; a vast fort rising above her own rich property, sacrificed by herself to her ally the sea.

The sailors from the Fleet were employed to defend the dykes; the frigates guarded the Zuyder Zee; the citizens enrolled themselves into militia companies under the command of the noblest families.

The manufacture of powder was carried on day and night. Every town exerted itself to send supplies of wheelbarrows, shovels, and pickaxes to the frontier to assist in the fortifications.

Armed sloops and gunboats sailed down the rivers to

prevent the enemy advancing in boats ; levies were raised all over the country, one man in every two being obliged to serve. Hope and courage rose high in a nation lately reduced to despair.

The Stadtholder set his soldiers to the work of demolishing the dykes. The sea rushed over his country palaces, burying in their hot-houses his beautiful collection of exotics and ruining his parks and gardens. All the meadow-land became marsh ; the army of the States was obliged to camp where they could find ground higher than the sea ; almost the only means of progress was by boats.

But Holland was saved !

Zeeland, animated by the example, turned with fury on the vainglorious conqueror. Aadenburg, the key to the province attacked by Nancré, flew to arms, and, small as was its garrison, not only resisted the French but, issuing from the town, inflicted on them a severe defeat.

Groningen beat back the invaders.

The country was at bay. Louis had roused more than he had looked for ; his haughty march was checked, and only a hasty retreat left him. Louvois was furious ; he had thought to see the Hague pillaged in a matter of days.

The King, mortified and enraged, returned to Saint Germain ; yet he had the greatness to admire the heroism that had sent him back.

The French army found itself disconcerted, bewildered. Spain was arming, the Empire and Brandenburg.

Fortune turned swiftly.

The utter agony of shame, bitterness, despair, gave place to the return of hope. Even the vastness of the sacrifice could not discourage the country that breathed once more in freedom.

The English commissioners returned to Whitehall : Buckingham disgusted with politics ; Arlington consoled by the rich bribes from France that had followed on the treaty of Heeswyck ; Halifax full of admiration for the youthful warrior who had sprung into fame with his defiance of France.

Buckingham also had something to say of William of Orange.

"He hath not a single redeeming vice, and I like him not—but he will set the world by the ears as surely as any Tamerlane or Cæsar."

So the English returned from their fruitless errand, and the great King was adored in Paris.

Sweden, Denmark, turned against the French. Europe was shaken from end to end; and in a few weeks, even days, the storm that had nearly overwhelmed the United Provinces became a great war whirlwind enveloping the world.

John de Witt does his part. His heart swells with pleasure at the deliverance of his country; he does justice, too late, to the Prince whom he has always mistrusted.

He is reviled, hated, cursed; the storm has already engulfed his brother.

Cornelius de Witt, who left the Hague with a guard of honour as plenipotentiary of Their Noble Mightinesses, returned to it on foot, a prisoner.

He is accused by one Tichelaer, a barber-surgeon, of a conspiracy to murder the Prince of Orange.

So vile is this man, so weak and improbable his tale, that at first John de Witt is not much concerned; his brother's innocence, he thinks, is too obvious.

To him, not to the people.

Tichelaer's story is good enough for them. It is accepted; spread through the country with horrid additions.

The Grand Pensionary finds that all his influence is not sufficient to save his brother. He spares nothing; he toils day and night, but he is a fallen man.

In the Gevangenpoort, under whose dark archway he has so often passed in his splendour, Cornelius de Witt lies expecting death, as he has expected it since the day at Dordt when he resisted the will of the people.

He is sick, and as he lies there in hospital he cuts with a little knife into the wood of his bed a view of his house at Dordt, of his brother's house, and of *The Seven Provinces*.

"Ah, is it over, the glory, the peace, the happiness?—must disgrace and shame end a life that was so pure and noble!"

Jacob de Witt is dazed. He cares nothing for the great events that tear the country; he has but one thing to say to his younger son—

"Where is Cornelius? . . . Why do they not set him free?"

He cannot understand that his once powerful son is helpless.

John de Witt, desperate, tries to save his brother by disarming the resentment of his enemies. He goes to the Assembly and resigns the post he has held most nobly for twenty years.

The States accept it. They ask the Prince if they may thank him for his services. . . . The Stadtholder, absorbed in the war, sends answer "Yes."

Still he cannot save Cornelius.

The people want blood.

The elder de Witt is put to the torture, which is a thing beyond credence, horrible; no confession is extorted from him. The unjust judges are defeated in their endeavours to please the mob.

John de Witt is distracted by the agony of Maria de Witt, the fears of his own children, the piteous bewilderment of his father, the dismay of his friends; his very trust in God is almost shaken.

In the bitterness of his despair he appeals to the man who was once his pupil.

The day before the final verdict on Cornelius (and his brother does not doubt that it will be death) the Stadtholder returns unexpectedly to the Hague.

Such a tumult of passionate, fierce joy greets him that for a moment even the accusations of Michael Tichelaer and the hate of Cornelius de Witt are forgotten.

He has come to ask the consent of the States to the removal of the Fleet from the Texel. He is received by the Assembly with more submission than ever his uncle obtained from his Parliament, they humbly recommend to him the necessity of restoring order in the country.

He reminds them that all the troops are needed on the frontier; he refuses to employ force. It is not likely that he would turn on the people who have put him where he is.

M. de Groot has fled to Brussels, Colonel Bampffield and other republican officers are dismissed the Army.

But the young Stadtholder takes no revenge on his enemies. He even publishes a proclamation commanding that no violence be used against the members of the fallen party; this is denounced as a forgery by those who are resolved to seal their triumph with blood.

John de Witt's resignation has not appeased the violence of his opponents, nor are they moved by his modest speech in the Assembly; afterwards some are haunted by these sentences—

"Great and Noble Lords—it was nineteen years ago on the 30th of July last that, for the first time, I took the oath in your Assembly in the capacity of Grand Pensionary of the Province of Holland. . . . It has pleased God, in His anger, to bring down upon the States those misfortunes in which they are now involved, and that in a manner so difficult to understand . . . that posterity will find it hard to believe.

"What is most distressing at this unhappy conjuncture is, that these sudden disasters and misfortunes have produced in the minds of the people not only a sentiment of general fear and dread, but a sinister feeling against their magistrates . . .

"Unjust as these suspicions are, I, at any rate, am overwhelmed by them, though I cannot but think that I might have been spared, since, as a humble servant of the State, I have only been bound to obey implicitly the commands of my masters.

"But whether it is that I am thought not to have properly carried out the functions of my office, or that ignorant people imagine that I have appropriated what never passed through my hands, I am so furiously inveighed against that I can in conscience come to no other conclusion than that my services must henceforth be prejudicial to the State. . . . I have, therefore, thought it would be best to beg your Noble and

Great Mightinesses, as I very humbly do, that it may please your goodness to relieve me of the exercise of my office."

Thus John de Witt, speaking for the last time in the Assembly, a few days before the States informed the Prince that the Perpetual Edict had been torn leaf from leaf, and each town returned the signature of its Deputies.

His resignation had been granted with grudging. There had been talk of an inquiry first; more than a hint of suspicion.

Yet the man who was accused of enriching himself from the public funds, left after a life-time of office so poor that he was forced to remind the States of their oft-repeated promise of a seat in the High Court, in order to have a livelihood for himself and his family.

And he had to endure the humiliation of this post being reluctantly given him; for the six hundred guilders it was worth, piteous sum as it was, would be his principal fortune.

The clamorous cries of the crowd assailing the very clouds with the name of William of Orange came to his ears even through the peace of his beloved garden . . .

Cornelius was in the Gevangenpoort expecting death . . . and his brother must see the Prince.

He took from his desk the letter the Stadtholder had sent him in answer to his appeal about his own affairs, and read it through again, as if he hoped to gain some knowledge of the writer's real feelings towards him. It had been delayed until Fagel had made known to the Prince John de Witt's refusal to serve under the new Chief of the State.

It was written from Bodegraven.

"SIR,—I have received your letter of the 12th inst. with the pasquinade that accompanied it. I should not have failed to answer it sooner had not the multiplicity of my occupations prevented me.

"I can assure you that I have always despised reports which are started in this manner, since not only my family, but I myself, have been attacked with a freedom and avidity beyond all bounds.

"As to the two points of which you make mention in yours,

namely, your handling of the Secret Service money, and the little care you are reported to have taken in providing the Army with all requirements, I can only say that as to the first I have no knowledge of it, and that the Deputies of the States, as you very properly observe, can better testify to this than any one else.

"As to the second, I do not, and cannot, doubt that you took such care of the Armies of the States, both by land and sea, as the conditions of affairs and of the times would allow, and in such a manner that they would have been capable of resisting the enemy.

"But you must be aware yourself that it would be impossible to specify all that may have been wanting, particularly to the land forces, and to verify either the trouble taken to supply deficiencies, or that which might and ought to have been taken at the time, or to determine who was in fault; for I am so taken up with business that I have involved myself as little as possible in looking into the past.

"You will, therefore, find a much better justification in your past acts of prudence than in anything you can obtain from me.

"I trust with all my heart to have some other opportunity of proving myself your affectionate friend,

"WILLIAM HENRY, Prince of Orange"

John de Witt read and reread the letter. It was cold, reserved he thought, well turned as was all the Prince indicted; as friendly, perhaps, as he could have expected. . . . It meant, possibly, that the Prince refused him all protection, but he could not hesitate at scruples of pride now.

He must appeal to the one man who could save his brother.

He took his hat, his cane, and mantle, and left the house, alone. His always modest establishment was already reduced to two servants and one clerk.

He was now merely a private citizen, and had neither means nor occupation for more.

Calling this one clerk, Van Oudenaller, to him before he left, de Witt gave him a letter of hope and comfort for Maria de Witt, Cornelius' wife, bidding him see that it caught the post for Dordt.

Once in the streets he pulled his hat over his eyes to avoid the hostile recognition of the crowd thronging the streets to give a reception to the Prince, who had just left the Assembly and was returning to the Marithuis.

John de Witt mingled with the others who filled the Stadtholder's chambers, and waited, with them, at the head of the fine double staircase.

The sound of cheers and shouts, that seemed as if they would never cease, was borne from without as the Prince entered the Palace.

He came slowly up the stairs, accompanied by a press of people carrying their hats in their hands.

He wore a dove-coloured suit and a black sash, a pink velvet mantle and a beaver with black feathers; there was a gold ribbon on his cane and gold cords on his right shoulder. M. Fagel was speaking to him, and he listened unsmilingly.

At the head of the stairs he paused and glanced round the people gathered to meet him.

Instantly his eye fell on John de Witt and he blushed violently.

He said nothing, but raised his hat. M. de Witt did the same, and those about them were silent.

"Highness," said John de Witt calmly, "will it please you to grant me speech with you?"

The red still lingered in William's cheek. He hesitated; a slight thing in most, in him, always so decided, a marked one.

M. Fagel fell back.

"I am glad to see you, Mynheer," said the Stadtholder. He seemed very mindful of the spectators. "Will you go into the cabinet . . . perhaps you do not know it . . ."

He moved forward and opened the door on his left.

John de Witt followed him. The others, even William Bentinck, remained without.

Prince John Maurice's cabinet was a beautiful room filled with treasures from the East Indies, fine pictures, Persian rugs, and inlaid furniture; the high window looked straight

on to the end of the Vyver, and the walk by the side of it where the people gathered to catch a glimpse of the Prince.

It was late in the day, and the sun had left the cabinet, filled now by a cold, dusky light.

The Prince took off his hat as John de Witt uncovered.

They had not met since William's departure for the war, a matter of weeks in time but a period full of great changes. Three months had served to cast down John de Witt, to make of him a reviled and hated man, and to exalt William of Orange into a hero.

There was little of the boy left about the young Stadtholder; his gravity was no longer the disguise of youthful passions but the seriousness of manhood.

He had put off his scholar's air of retirement and wore a composed manner of authority and alertness.

"You have changed," said John de Witt, looking at him steadily.

"Mynheer, I have been remodelled by my duties," answered the Stadtholder, "and altered by the necessity of the times."

He stood against the light arch of the window; his profile was towards John de Witt, who still gazed at the keen, thin face tanned by out-door life, the brilliant eyes cast down, and the heavy, waving hair falling on to the lace collar.

"We did not part lovingly, Highness, but it was with more ease we spoke then than now, I think."

The Prince looked up.

"What can we have to say to one another, Mynheer John de Witt?"

"Not much, perhaps, but something. . . . I think we meet for the last time."

There was a difference also in de Witt. His late illness and his distresses had left him wasted, lined and worn; his old stateliness remained, but at times his voice shook and broke a little.

As he spoke he seated himself with a fatigued air.

"I cannot frame into sentences what there is between us, Highness."

The Prince spoke suddenly, almost fiercely—

“Do you know me now, Mynheer? Do you see what manner of man I am? You need not have feared.”

John de Witt looked at him earnestly and sadly.

“I do admit that you have nobly belied what I once thought of you.”

“Why did you think such things of me? You imagined I should become the tool of France, a traitor; you always mistrusted and disliked me. Why do you come to me now? I think you wronged me . . .”

He turned his face away sharply, and gazed at the glittering waters of the Vyver glimpsing through the window.

John de Witt answered slowly—

“I was the fool of my own desires, the dupe of my hopes. . . . I dreamed to make you a great citizen of a great Republic.”

The Prince did not look round.

“You chose the wrong material, Mynheer; you cannot trim a Nassau into the compass of burgher virtues.”

“I was at fault . . . I did not allow for your ambitions.”

William turned now.

“My ambitions are to save my country and the Reformed religion. . . . When I was a child I desired my birth-right. . . . I could never serve . . . I was not schooled in ways of love and gentleness. . . . You did your duty to me as you conceived it, and taught me much,—for one thing the bitterness of a long humiliation, and the lessons that may be learnt in loneliness. I cannot make a parade of gratitude—I cannot thank you—I cannot forget what will influence all my life; but I understand you as you never understood me—and so I can forgive.”

John de Witt bent his head.

“I did what I thought right, what I must think right still. . . . I taught you to be a patriot and to fear God. I acted for the love of my country and for no vile motive of my own.”

He looked up.

"And for my temerity in opposing a Nassau I am very bitterly punished, Your Highness."

William put his hand on the back of the chair behind him.

"You could have stayed in office if you would have served me."

"The States are my master, and I resigned while they were still my master."

The Stadtholder interrupted—

"You shall be unmolested in your retirement, Mynheer."

"I do not think of myself."

"Of whom then?"

"My brother."

A shade crossed William's face.

"Your brother," he repeated.

John de Witt rose.

"My brother—unjustly accused, unjustly tried; a victim to the fears of the magistrates, the passions of the crowd."

William faced him.

"I cannot believe your brother guilty," he said; "yet he has failed to clear himself on his trial—and the man who was killed at my feet in the camp mentioned his name—yet—I do not believe it."

"Then," cried M. de Witt, "save him, for you alone can!"

"Hath he not a fair trial?" demanded the Stadtholder.

"By Heaven, no!"

"I have heard very little of it . . . I have been so occupied with the war."

"Your Highness has the civil administration also."

William glanced at him quickly.

"If your brother is innocent will he not be acquitted?"

"He will be condemned to death unless Your Highness interferes—he, *my* brother, on the word of a man whom he once ordered to be fined for beating his maid-servant."

The Stadtholder did not answer.

John de Witt spoke again, his cheek pale but his eyes burning.

"My noble lord—if you ever hated me, you are avenged."

I would never have wished you a tenth of what has befallen me. You have your father's dignities ; the people have placed you where he sat, and my Republic is swept aside—is a mere interlude in the reign of the House of Orange. If ever you wished me evil consider that I see my life-work come to nothing, that I hear myself cursed by the people I have toiled for, that I am accused of being a thief and a traitor—and be satisfied.

“If ever I have humiliated you or angered you—and never did I so wantonly—consider that I have had to ask the States to give me a position that will bring me bread ; consider that my family is ruined, that I leave nothing but a heritage of failure to my sons—and again be satisfied.

“I shall not trouble you—I am not made for intrigue ; had I been I need not have stood before you now asking for my brother's life. . . . After my great labour I shall be content to take a little idleness in which to prepare me for death. . . . I shall not trouble you.

“Give me my brother's life. . . . He is an innocent man ; you, who have looked on him, must know it. . . . He is a man who has given all to his country ; he has been great . . . and . . . they tortured him. . . . Oh, God forgive Your Highness if you knew of that ! . . .”

The Prince moved towards the window.

“I only heard to-day.”

John de Witt put his hand over his hot and aching eyes.

“He is also sufficiently punished for having withstood your Highness. . . . I ask, nay, I demand, his life.”

William turned ; he too was pale.

“Were he guilty, Mynheer, he should not die by virtue of your honourable family. . . . I blame myself that I did not sooner interpose—and greatly am I ashamed that he was put to the torture. . . . But the mob rules here, not I. I have a task so manifold before me that I might well despair—the country under water ; the peasants rising ; the enemy but just repulsed ; the towns in a state of revolution. . . . My amnesty

is scarcely heeded. . . . Yet I will save M. Cornelius de Witt."

"I do not need to thank Your Highness, for you would injure your own honour should you have refused."

William coughed.

"I will do what I can . . . at least, they shall not take his life. . . . But if they banish him, you must not blame me."

"I know there is an astonishing fury against us. . . . Banishment! I have lived here twenty years, but all now has changed; with Cornelius I will gladly go into banishment, if it must be."

The Stadtholder's large eyes rested on him gravely.

"Mynheer, as I can judge the temper of the people, you are scarcely safe at the Hague. I would advise you leave it soon—to-morrow, you—and M. Cornelius de Witt."

"My noble lord," said John de Witt proudly, "you know me guiltless of these charges laid to me?"

"My letter told you so."

"It was not warm in my defence."

The Stadtholder answered straightly—

"I think you made mistakes, I told you so when our positions were reversed. I think the defences of the country shamefully neglected—your peace policy fatal—your embassy to Louis calculated to give colour to vile reports; but I know you, Mynheer, for an honourable man."

John de Witt very slightly smiled.

"I thank your Noble Highness for so much," he said.

William coloured in response to the tone of it.

"Have you ever held such worthy opinions of me," he asked, "that I should bear warm testimony to your virtues? Your policy is not my policy."

"You have saved Holland; with you rests the glory of her deliverance, as with me the odium of her fall; but I would no less have saved her had hatred given me time to speak or malice allowed me space to act—I still, Highness, defend my policy."

He rested his eyes full on the Prince's face, but William kept his eyes averted.

"I would do justice to you, Mynheer—had I known you in any capacity save that of gaoler I might have loved you. . . . I always hated speech, and am not skilled at explanations. . . . If I have been ungracious let circumstances be my excuse . . ."

John de Witt answered ardently.

"If you love your country I will forgive you that you hate me,—nay, if my fall be of advantage to the State in raising up a stronger protector, one that the people trust and love, I am thankful for it. . . . They trusted me once, and shouted for Cornelius when we rode our galiots in the Thames. . . . Beware of popularity, my noble lord."

William pressed his handkerchief to his lips, still looking away.

"Do not fear that I will not serve my country—I bear an unfinished motto, when I was a boy I completed it proudly 'I will maintain the power and glory of the House of Orange'—now I would add 'Liberty and the Protestant Religion' to those words of mine."

John de Witt was silent a moment, then he said slowly—

"I grieve the chance that makes us enemies, for we should have shown well as friends, my lord."

The Prince turned and fixed at last his bright glance again on de Witt.

"Mynheer, when King Mithridates Eupator came to the throne, he sent a message to his enemies telling them of his accession. . . . No more was needed, they understood and destroyed themselves. . . . So between us; you will not serve me, and I need not tell you you must go. . . . Leave the Hague, Mynheer—and soon."

"When my brother is set at liberty, Your Highness."

"That shall be to-morrow."

"You are staying here?"

"I quit early to-morrow for Woerden, Mynheer, to inspect the fortifications of the town."

"Then will you leave some soldiery behind Your Highness, for I have a fear of the unchecked violence of the mob. The Gevangenpoort hath been twice attacked, and I think my brother's life in danger."

"Count Tilly's dragoons shall remain to keep order in the Hague."

"I thank Your Highness."

Mechanically John de Witt fastened together the clasps of his black velvet mantle.

The Prince still stood, his aristocratic figure in the dove grey in keeping with the rich, quiet, and sombre room.

They were looking at each other, and there was more in the eyes of each than any words could have touched.

M. de Witt moved slowly towards the door.

"I cannot leave you—" he said in a low voice, and with a simple air of grandeur, "you who have been my pupil—I cannot leave you for ever without saying how I shall ever pray for your prosperity, and that, though you cannot be more zealous, you may be more fortunate than I have been in serving our country.

"You have begun very nobly, may God keep you faithful to your ideals, guard you from your enemies, and make you worthy of the trust reposed in you by this unhappy land. Good-night, my lord."

William made a half movement towards him.

"M. de Witt!" he said in a stifled voice. "M. de Witt!"

The fallen Minister smiled, almost tenderly.

"You have a hard task before you—as I well know."

William held out his hand.

"Forget I am Nassau and take my hand as that of one who should be grateful to you . . ."

John de Witt responded instantly; the fine fingers clasped. It seemed as if both men must speak, but no word passed.

"Good-night, Mynheer," the Prince said at last.

"Good-night, Your Highness."

John de Witt passed through the crowded antechamber and out into the street.

For the first time in twenty years he found himself without the cares of government, without the routine of pressing business to attend to.

His body obeyed the new condition of his mind ; he found himself wandering with no set purpose, a thing he had not done since his student days in Dordt.

He realised as he went on his way that it was pleasant to walk aimlessly in the last glow of an August sun . . . perhaps he was a little stunned, weakened by illness and misfortune ; his thoughts travelled back to early hopes and interests. He was a free man at last—at last he could find rest . . .

At last.

He and Cornelius and their old father could live peaceably in the Spanish Netherlands. He would grow peaches and tulips, translate Horace, and watch his daughters spin or play the guitar.

It would be harder for Cornelius, for he was ever a man of action ; but for himself he could not deny that he was utterly weary and that repose seemed sweet.

Leaving the crowded streets, he walked along the side of the canal that led to the Nieuwe Kerk.

He sighed with a pleasurable sense of the peace to come as he watched the slow barges pass down the bright water.

Some were laden with flowers and fruits ; from the tall trees came soft scents and delicate sounds of the branches.

John de Witt sighed again.

A stork with a fish in its beak, looking like the very arms of the Hague, stood on the bank a moment, then flew off to one of the red roofs mounting like double steps to the highest stone of painted brick.

The sun was setting behind Ryswyck ; the sight of the clear sky purged with celestial fire from all vapours and clouds animated the heart of John de Witt like prayer or music.

He bared his head.

It was quiet here, no one to molest or insult the melancholy, divine dignity of evening.

He crossed the little bridge before the church, walking

lightly like one who does not think of the earth on which he treads.

It was over ; his life-work done ; nor was he afraid of God's judgment on his actions though man had condemned them all.

He advanced to the church thinking to pray there, for his mood was exalted.

As he opened the door a paper pinned to it caught his eye. It bore bold writing, and he stepped back to read.

The light of the sunset was still bright enough for him to see.

"Lucifer calls from Hell, 'When is Cornelius de Witt coming? I grow impatient—let him come at once, let him bring his brother but leave his head!'

"Lucifer calls from Hell, 'When are the de Witts coming?'

"The burghers call from the Hague, 'Expect them to-morrow!'"

John de Witt stood on the church step staring at the paper.

The rapture died from his face ; his eyes widened and his cheek paled.

Rapidly the sunset faded.

Another barge went by, a shadow in the dusk ; it brought no image of peace now to the man at the door of the church.

What is brewing—what is enmeshing us?

He did not enter the church, but turned back to his own house slowly.

"Lucifer calls from Hell, 'When are the de Witts coming?'

"The burghers call from the Hague, 'Expect them to-morrow!'"

CHAPTER XII

AUGUST 20, 1672

HE was still dressing when Johanna de Zwynndrecht came to him.

"The gaoler's maid from the Gevangenpoort, John——"

She could say no more.

"From Cornelius?"

He had just finished shaving, and stood with his collar untied and the strings in his hand.

"Yes."

"Ah, he sends for me?"

"Yes."

John de Witt stepped up to her and put his arm about her.

"Johanna—my dear—has he been sentenced?"

"To banishment—the councillors, the maid says, read him his sentence in the prison this morning."

She dropped her head on his shoulder and a sob broke from her full heart.

"Oh, John!"

"My dear, my dear, he has his life and his liberty. I will go fetch him from the prison—at once."

His sister shuddered.

"Yes, and yet——"

"What?"

"Ah, they have been rioting all night—I wish we were away from the Hague——"

"We shall be—to-day."

He drew her gently downstairs.

There his daughter Anna waited in the dining-room.

It was not yet nine, and the early sun had not touched the cool chamber.

The gaoler's maid had gone again, simply leaving this message, that M. de Witt was to be set at liberty, and had, on hearing this, at once requested that his brother might be sent for.

"I will go," repeated John de Witt, "at once—and bring him away."

His daughter, who held her hands clenched and pressed upon her heart, looked at him with a wild expression.

"Father—must you go? Cannot Uncle Cornelius be brought here? *Must* you go?"

"Anna!"

"Do you know what the streets are like?—the maid said every one was furious because my uncle was not condemned to death."

She rose, and her pale eyes brimmed with tears.

"Do not go——"

"Cornelius sent for me."

"He did not understand——"

"Dearest, the Hague is safe enough——"

"No, no!"

"There are the burgher companies——"

"They are Orangist."

He was not to be persuaded.

"Cornelius sent for me."

Johanna also was fearful.

"You will, at least, not go alone?" she said.

"I will take the clerk and Van den Wissel if it please you."

"Yes—I will tell them."

Anna was not to be comforted. What she had seen and heard these last weeks at the Hague had utterly unnerved her; she clung to her father convulsively, dumb with the swelling sobs.

Agneta sat in the wide window-seat, her head bowed on to her knees.

M. Van Ouvealler, who had been abroad that morning,

had repeated to her, in his agitation, some of the remarks he had heard in the streets.

"Michael Tichelaer," he declared, "is running up and down telling every man he meets that M. Cornelius is as good as acquitted, and that he must by no means escape his punishment."

The presage of unimaginable evil conveyed in this held Agneta speechless; her spirit was so chained with terror that she could not even join Anna in her vain entreaties.

John de Witt strove to quiet and console them all by speaking of homely things; he desired his sister to prepare a meal for Cornelius, who would have had but a prison breakfast, and to lay out some garments for him, for he intended to take his brother at once to his country-house, where Maria—his wife—and her children stayed.

Jacob de Witt, he knew, would wish to accompany him, but the old man was sitting happily in the garden with his little grandson John, who had rushed to tell him that Cornelius was safe, and he would not trouble him, so commanded them not to let him know of his departure.

Not waiting for the coach, he bid the man bring it round to the Gevangenpoort in half an hour's time. The prison was but a few yards away. As he gave this order the women were silent, and averted their eyes from one another.

They knew it meant that Cornelius would not be able to walk, or perhaps even to stand.

The day before he had been tortured . . . by the rack, the pulley and the cord.

Johanna felt as if the screws were turned on her own heart as the hideous image of her brother in agony flashed before her; she turned aside with gulping tears.

At about half-past nine John de Witt gently left their sorrowful company and set out on foot for the Gevangenpoort.

He had with him the two clerks, M. Bacherus and M. Oувенaller, and his faithful servant, Van den Wissel, who had nearly been slain in Van der Graef's attack on his master.

It was a warm, lovely morning ; little flakes of gold lay in the ripples of the Vyver, and there was a shimmering of light and shade in the chestnuts and elms.

John de Witt noticed nothing warranted to rouse the fears his sister and daughters entertained.

There were the women going to market, the farmers drawn by their dogs in their little painted carts, the usual passers-by ; one saluted him, for the rest he was unnoticed.

He passed the spot where John Van Olden Barnenveldt had been executed, and thought of it, as he had continually done of late when he crossed the Plaats.

Many times had he looked at the old gate prison, now with a horrid interest and a painful shrinking.

The plain brick building, with its high, tiled roof pierced with two gabled windows built over the low, dark arch, above which the arms of Holland were set, had always been a place of awe to him, because it had witnessed the imprisonment and agonies of those early Reformers who had been martyred by the Inquisition, but now its association made him quiver to his heart.

Cornelius had been tortured here . . . yesterday.

De Witt went very pale as he traversed the passage of the arch.

At the door of the prison-house, on the right, a small, mean entrance, were two soldiers of the burgher guard.

They had been placed there ever since the attempt of the mob to carry forth Cornelius de Witt.

John de Witt set his lips.

The moment cost him something.

M. Van Oudenaller rang the heavy iron bell.

The gaoler opened to them, and almost immediately.

"Which way?" asked M. de Witt.

The gaoler stared.

"Come," said M. Van Oudenaller, "you know M. John de Witt."

The man pulled off his cap at that, and M. de Witt followed him across the narrow threshold and up a narrow stairway,

worn, old and dark, that wound up to a long, dark corridor lit by small windows giving on the inner courtyard.

Opposite one of these windows the gaoler stopped, slipped back the bolts from a low, heavy wooden door, and stood aside for M. de Witt to enter.

He stepped into a fair-sized room with a rough-beamed ceiling, plaster walls, a low-arched, brick fireplace, and one window overlooking the Plaats and barred lengthwise and across with iron.

There were a few chairs, rush-bottomed, a handsome carved table, and opposite the fireplace, and sideways to the window, a simple wooden bed, on which lay Cornelius in his night-gown, a red coverlet over him; near him stood a second, smaller table, on which were a few books and a shining, brass candlestick.

Seeing the door open, Cornelius raised himself on his elbow expectantly.

John de Witt crossed the room, the clerks, servant, and the gaoler behind him.

When the brothers had parted, four months ago, one had been the governor of his country at home, the other the guardian of her honour at sea; they had been treated with deference, surrounded with respect; the greatest men in the land . . . four months ago.

They were both stately and of austere manners, both mindful that they were not alone.

"How are you, brother?" asked John, advancing to the bedside. "I have not seen you since your return from the Fleet."

Cornelius was equally resolved not to show the feeling that was too deep indeed for expression.

"Nor I you since your wounds and illness," he answered.

He fell back again on his hard pillow. John glanced at his bandaged hands, at his grey and drawn face, and the colour rushed into his own and ebbed again.

"I am come to take you away, Cornelius," he said faintly.

The Ruard's brown eyes flashed with their old fire.

"Not yet, I do not submit to my sentence."

John seated himself on the rush-bottomed chair beside the bed.

"What was the crime your sentence accused you of?"

"None—that is my point; by a flagrant breach of the law the sentence made no accusation, but merely condemned me to banishment."

"It was read to you here?"

"Yes—though I claimed it should be delivered at the bar of the court . . . it was for fear of the riots, they said."

John looked at him in a troubled, earnest way.

"Forgive me," said Cornelius, breathing heavily with pain. "I was under torture for two hours yesterday, and as my rheumatism made me sensitive . . . it has left me weak. . . . I cannot explain it all to you as I should wish."

John wiped his brow, and then clenched his handkerchief in his hand.

"I must get you away; you are at least free, Cornelius."

"No—I will appeal to the Grand Council against this unlawful sentence."

"I dare not consent to any delay in your release."

Cornelius answered proudly—

"Shall I leave this prison a condemned criminal when I am innocent?"

"Alas! I fear you will never obtain justice—only through my personal appeal to the Prince have the people been disappointed of your death."

"The Prince!" repeated Cornelius fiercely. "I do not wish the pity of the Prince, but the justice of the States."

"That is," said John, "what you will never obtain in these wild and passionate times."

"What we shall neither of us obtain under William of Orange," replied Cornelius.

The gaoler had left them, yet even before the two clerks the remark was rash.

"The Statdholder," said John de Witt, "did what he could—he warned me to leave the Hague soon."

But Cornelius was ever the more fiery and unyielding of the two; he had a warlike pride not easily subdued; with the same unshaken firmness with which he had endured the rack he protested that he would appeal to the Grand Council.

His brother represented that it would be in vain, as the decision of the court was held to be final.

"I wonder," said Cornelius, "that you try to persuade me against my honour. Why should I submit to tyranny?"

He looked at his hands, through the linen bandages of which the blood was oozing.

"Have I not borne enough?" he demanded proudly.

John de Witt rose in agitation.

"I think of your safety . . . let us get out of the Hague——"

"Not banished, and dishonoured," said Cornelius firmly; "and ruined too. They have taken all my offices and dignities from me, and ordered me to pay the costs of the trial. Shall I go to my children a useless, degraded man?"

"Ah, Cornelius, but you cherish a vain dream when you imagine that the Grand Council can or will do you justice. I wish to save your life—for that is all that we can save."

"See my sentence," answered Cornelius eagerly; "it is so full of flaws, of breaches of the law, that they would not dare to refuse my appeal."

John saw his brother was resolved; that he must, at least, humour him.

"I will see the sentence," he said. "Go to the Record Office and fetch me here a copy of my brother's sentence."

The clerk left the room.

John de Witt went back to the bedside.

"I am in anguish till I see you out of this," he said.

"I will appeal."

"Cornelius, the coach waits below—to take you home."

"Home! Am I not a banished, outcast man?"

"There are Maria and your children."

Cornelius was silent.

"You think I give cowardly counsels," said his brother,

"but I am but too well convinced that we need hope for nothing more in Holland."

He turned away abruptly to hide his agitation, and crossed to the window.

Little groups of people were gathered on the Plaats, mostly looking towards the prison.

The Groote Kerk struck half-past ten.

John walked up and down the rough boards, looking on the ground.

Cornelius watched him with dark and resolute eyes.

Both were very pale.

"What of Maria?" asked Cornelius at length, very low.

"She has written to you?"

"Every day—but was always so eager to hearten me, poor soul, that I know not much of herself."

"She is well; she hath kept up a wonderful courage. . . . She is coming to the Hague to be the first to greet you on your release."

Again Cornelius was silent, then he said—

"She will hardly know me."

John could not answer.

The Ruard spoke again—

"John, I am innocent of even the shadow of what is imputed to me."

"This to me!" cried his brother reproachfully.

"A man might well get bemused with all their lies," said Cornelius wearily.

Silence again. An unaccountable uneasiness possessed John de Witt; he longed to see his brother at his side in his coach, the open country before them, the Hague behind.

"Bacherus is very long." He broke the pause at last.

The Record Office was only a few moments' walk distant.

John looked from the window again.

The crowd had increased.

"Van Ouvenaller," he said, "go and see what hath become of M. Bacherus."

The second clerk left.

The window commanded a view of the Plaats, the Vyver, and the Kneuterdyk Avenue, with John de Witt's house at the corner, and the window in the narrow corridor looked on to the court enclosed by the prison building, but they were without any means of discovering what was happening in the Buitenhof opposite the prison door.

In a few moments M. Ouveallier returned, pallid and trembling.

"Ah, Mynheer," he exclaimed, "there is an angry crowd gathered—they have sent away your carriage, and I fear that M. Bacherus will not be able to return."

"What is this?" cried Cornelius, starting up. "John, you must go at once—I should never have sent for you!"

"What do they say?" asked the younger de Witt.

"They say that they will not have Mynheer Cornelius leave in triumph, but that he must go on foot."

"Is Tichelaer there?"

"Yes, among the ringleaders—calling horrid names on you both, Mynheeren!"

"John," said Cornelius firmly, "you must leave me while you—can."

"Yes," answered his brother, catching up his mantle, "I will leave you, because I will go to the States and complain of these disturbances; but I shall return very shortly to liberate you."

"I trust to your advice," answered Cornelius. "I will go with you on your return, if you think it fit. Good-bye—brother."

"Good-bye, for a little while."

Putting on his hat, and accompanied by Van Ouveallier and his servant, John de Witt descended to the mean passage from which the insignificant door gave straight on to the street.

The gaoler, Van Bossi, opened it for his exit, but as de Witt made to step out of the prison the two burghers on guard crossed their muskets before him.

"No one can leave," one of them said, and roughly motioned him back.

John de Witt surveyed him sternly.

"Why not?" he demanded. "You know very well who I am."

Others of the burgher company came running up to where M. de Witt stood in the narrow doorway behind the crossed muskets.

"You cannot leave without an order!" a soldier shouted.

"Whose order do you require?" asked John de Witt.

"That of our officer."

The crowd began hurrying up from all quarters; seeing who stood in the doorway, they raised a shout of—

"Fire! Fire!"

A musket was discharged.

John de Witt coloured with anger, and was in the act of forcing his way out, regardless of the threatening yells, when the gaoler thrust him violently back and quickly closed the door.

John de Witt had been handled with such force that he stumbled and fell at the foot of the stairs.

As he rose again he lifted the long, disordered hair from his face, on which was an expression of horror, as if he had seen an image of hideous death.

"I wish I were out of this," he muttered. "How can I get out of this?"

The gaoler stood dumb and terrified.

Quickly John de Witt composed himself.

"Take me back to my brother," he said.

He had not ascended half the stairs before the bell of the prison rang.

Two burgher captains stood without: Van Os, a postman, and Van Asselyn, a bookseller.

John de Witt was called down to speak to them; they were moved by his composed, serene demeanour, and promised to persuade the captain of the guard to let him pass.

He waited for their return, but in vain; the other burghers prevented it.

"I wish I were out of this," repeated M. de Witt. "How shall I get out? Is there no other way but this?"

"No, Mynheer."

"No other exit at all?"

"None whatever, Mynheer," admitted the frightened gaoler. John de Witt bit his lower lip.

"Very well, I am going back to my brother," he said

He had already been in the prison nearly two hours.

As he mounted the stairs he could hear, clearly enough, the shouts and cries of the mob.

Johanna's fears and the tears of Anna—the placard of last night—were all very clear in his mind. He shuddered despite himself. There was an atmosphere about the dull, confined spaces of the prison sufficient in itself to depress the heart and check the delusions of hope.

The gaoler, alarmed by the turn things were taking, confided to M. de Witt that Michael Tichelaer, before his release that morning (he had been in prison during the trial of Cornelius) had uttered the most horrid threats against the brothers, so that he, Van Bossi, had sent to ask the judges to keep him in the prison until the Ruard was in safety.

But the judges had ordered Tichelaer to be released, declaring that they would see that order was preserved. But all the morning Tichelaer had been going up and down the Hague, inflaming the people by saying they were like to lose their victim through the foolish clemency of His Highness.

Van Bossi added that he would send his servant to the States, who were now sitting, asking them to dispatch a force to hold the people in check.

"Is the Stadtholder still at the Hague?" asked M. de Witt.

"Mynheer, he left for Woerden at half-past eight this morning."

John de Witt entered in silence his brother's room, leaving his clerk and servant below. He found Cornelius reading a little Elzevir Horace, which he held awkwardly in his bandaged hands

"Cornelius."

"John—returned!"

They were alone now, unwatched; their one care to conceal their uneasiness from each other.

"I cannot leave the prison," said John, seating himself beside the bed, "the streets are too disordered——"

"Trapped!" muttered Cornelius, "trapped!—that rogue Tichelaer means my death."

"The gaoler has sent his servant to the States," answered his brother quickly, "to demand protection for the prison."

"Ah!—it is as serious as that?"

Cornelius laid down the Horace.

"I wish I could stand," he said through his teeth.

John turned his eyes away.

"I should never have sent for you," continued his brother, reproaching himself.

"I am safe enough—the Prince left Count Tilly behind——"

A sudden roar from the Plaats broke off his speech.

"Tilly's dragoons!" cried Cornelius, who heard horsemen.

John was at the window.

"No—the burgher companies."

Not the forces of the States, but the soldiers of the people were arriving at the Plaats; perhaps fifteen hundred of them already surrounding the prison.

The company of the blue stationed itself by the Vyver; four other companies marched out of sight; while the division of the white, orange, and blue took up their position in front of the Gevangenpoort.

John de Witt could see them exchange pleasantries with the crowd, while many among them echoed the popular cry—

"Up with Orange, down with de Witt!"

"Heaven guard us," he muttered, "if we must trust to these!"

Van Bossi returned.

The message had, he said, been taken to the States, who had ordered out the cavalry, and dispatched a messenger to the Prince of Orange, as he was the only man, they declared, who could restore order in the Hague.

"Have the magistrates no power?" asked Cornelius scornfully.

Very little, it seemed—since the arming of the burgher companies they trembled for their own lives.

"How far is the Prince's camp?" asked John de Witt.

"Eight leagues, they say."

The gaoler added that the Hague was in a hideous state of ferment and passion, and that the States feared a general riot, in which every one of republican sympathies would be massacred.

John de Witt rose with an uncontrollable sound of anguish, for he thought of his family separated from him by only a few yards, yet at the mercy of the mob.

"O God, my God," he cried, "spare me that at least!"

Cornelius struggled into a sitting position.

"Van Bossi," he said firmly, "desire some of these burghers to come and speak with us."

John turned eagerly.

"Yes, bring these men before us—let them state their grievances to our faces."

"Mynheeren, I dare not bring any of them into the prison."

"We are not afraid," said Cornelius calmly.

Van Bossi looked from one to the other.

"I wish you both out of this, Mynheeren," he declared.

"Has any one been to the States?" cried John de Witt, walking up and down. "If they would let me out that I might speak to the States myself."

He could not believe that the Assembly he had swayed for twenty years would be deaf to him.

"Have a little patience, Mynheer," answered Van Bossi, "and I will speak to Van Ruysch, the colonel of the burghers, who is outside the door."

"We thank you," said Cornelius. "And, my friend, since my brother is like to be detained here will you send us some food?"

The man stared at him, confounded at his calm.

"It is past midday," said John. "Bring us what you have."

The gaoler left in silence.

Cornelius took up a book with an air of unconcern; it was a volume of French plays, but he did not look at the pages; his eyes could not leave his brother, who was standing by the barred window gazing out on to the Plaats.

"What are they doing?" asked Cornelius after a while.

"Gathering in great numbers—armed, all armed," answered John. "There comes Tilly and his men."

He could not repress a little sigh of relief as the guards, three hundred strong, swept through the crowd and took up their position before the prison.

A cry of "Long live His Highness!" broke from the people, and "Down with the de Witts!"

"We are of the same opinion!" some of the soldiery shouted back.

"They too are disaffected," muttered John.

"But Count Tilly is a brave and loyal officer," said Cornelius.

Each was very careful not to show the slightest sign of inward uneasiness; they did not dare speak on intimate subjects for fear they should betray themselves.

John left the window and came back to the bedside.

The sun was blazing full across the bars and throwing their likeness on the rough floor. The maid who had brought the message to John de Witt's house entered with a homely meal of bread, cheese, and dried fish.

"Why are you crying, my child?" asked John gently.

She pressed her apron to her eyes.

"Oh, Mynheer," she said in terrified sobbing, "the people! . . . outside . . . they grow every moment more excited . . ."

"What do they want?" asked Cornelius calmly.

"To kill you!" she answered in a burst of terror. "Oh, Mynheer!"

The Ruard's dark eyes flashed.

"Very well," he said, "I am here—let them come—but they have no excuse to detain my brother."

"They will not let Mynheer John escape," the girl sobbed, shivering. "Some of them are searching the houses next door to see if there should be any secret passage, and there has one climbed on to the roof with a gun—if you try to escape."

"We have no thought of it," said Cornelius proudly.

The maid gave him a wild look and hurried out of the room.

The brothers avoided each other's glance. John surveyed the window, stoutly barred, the iron-clamped door giving on to the narrow corridor . . . certainly they were in a trap . . .

He set the meal himself on the smooth polished table, and his thoughts were in his home on the Kneuterdyk. He pictured Johanna's piteous preparations for their return; her anxious arrangement for dinner—which was standing now untouched in the dining-room—her setting out of travelling garments for Cornelius; their old father, happy again at the thought of his son's release; the doves in the trees and the girls in their pale dresses . . .

What bitterness were they enduring as the time went on and the threatening crowd spread between them and the prison?

These little trifling recollections were the keenest stabs in the wounded heart of John de Witt. . . . Not the thought of his useless life-work, not the vision of approaching death were as potent to lacerate his soul as the thought of those waiting in vain . . . in vain

Cornelius spoke—

"How is our father of late?"

John did not look at him as he answered—

"Well—but failing. He is engaged on a book of meditations, he writes them down in the evenings . . ."

"I should have liked," said Cornelius, "to see him again."

He was under no delusions as to his own fate, his one hope was to save his brother.

"You shall see him," answered John firmly, though his heart swelled with choking anguish. "We shall get out of this. Why, these people are our countrymen—they are not murderers'

"John, I was doomed since that day in Dordt," returned Cornelius. "How they howl! I wonder why they hate us so?"

His eyes narrowed as he listened to the noise rising from the Plaats.

Neither spoke until they had finished their meal, each eating to maintain this show of calm before the other.

At the end, John rose and went again to the window.

He could not forbear a start.

In the centre of the Plaats a section of the burgher company of the red was putting up the scaffold, always erected on this spot for an execution.

Cornelius could not but perceive his agitation.

"What are they doing now?"

"Nothing—only it is such a vast crowd."

He was absolutely composed again, though he could not doubt for whom the scaffold was intended.

He was saved from further question by the entry of Van Bossi.

The gaoler was almost inarticulate with fear and dismay.

They gathered from his broken speech that two of the burgher captains had scaled the walls of the prison-yard and, in company with Ruysch, who had been admitted, demanded to see the brothers.

Before he had finished speaking, noisy voices were heard in the corridor, and the three men pushed rudely into the chamber.

They were armed with swords and muskets, and wore flaunting orange favours.

The gaoler stepped aside, and the intruders found themselves face to face with John de Witt, who had turned full towards them.

Seeing a tall gentleman of a princely carriage, erect and stately as any soldier, with a pale but perfectly composed countenance of a handsome nobility, looking at them with the eyes that had faced Europe, their mere violence was abashed.

"What is your authority?" asked John de Witt.

"I come from the States," said Ruysch sullenly. "To see you do not escape before we hear what His Noble and Mighty Highness proposes to do with you."

"Did the States send you on that errand?" demanded Cornelius.

"Would you rather be left to the citizens of the Hague?" said one of the other men, avoiding his eye.

"If you have been sent to protect us from the violence of the mob, I thank you," said John. "But we are neither answerable to the States nor to His Highness, but are free men."

"We do not deny it," replied Ruysch, who wished to keep on the side of the law.

"Very well." John took up his hat. "I will go to the States, while you guard my brother, and procure an order for his release."

His calm air of authority overawed them, but they stepped before the door.

"By what right do you detain me?" he demanded.

Ruysch, who had no pretext, could only say, "Wait a little longer, sir, the people are too excited."

John de Witt looked at him a moment in silence, then he said—

"Will you let my clerk and servant depart?"

They could not in decency refuse.

Ruysch gave ungracious acquiescence.

"Will you send one of your men with them to see them through the crowd?"

M. Ruysch hesitated, then saw a chance of ridding himself of an onerous duty.

"I will go myself," he said.

John de Witt perceived his motive, but did not quarrel with it, since it equally well served his turn.

There were pen and ink on the table; tearing the fly-leaf from the French volume he wrote on it an urgent message to Van Oudenaller, entreating him to conduct his children into a place of safety. He handed it to M. Ruysch.

"Give this to my clerk who is below," he said; and with an earnest look of nobility that brought the blood to Ruysch's cheek, he added simply, "I know very well what is ahead of me, and I ask you, as you fear God, to see my children safe."

"I will do it," answered Ruysch awkwardly.

He left, meanly glad to escape the task of protecting the brothers.

"I wish," he said as he stepped from the prison, "that I had never seen the MM. de Witt."

John now turned to the two burgher officers; with a disarming courtesy he bid them sit at the table, and Cornelius offered them wine.

"You are brave men and honourable citizens, my brother is innocent—you will defend him, you will assure the people he is innocent."

The statesman who had guided his country through the storms of European politics for twenty years found no trouble in influencing a couple of ignorant burghers whom he employed all his arts to gain.

They protested their goodwill and went out to keep guard in the corridor.

John de Witt's hope now rested in Count Tilly, who with the utmost firmness was sweeping the crowd back across the Plaats.

A goldsmith named Verhoef, in company with Michael Tichelaer, had taken the head of one of the burgher companies, and was practically master of the moment.

John de Witt could hear him threateningly order Tilly to retire; he saw Tilly ride out from his troops to answer them.

His words came with a faint clearness to the prison window.

"Burghers of the Hague, do you wish to fill your streets with blood? If you do, possibly you may be the first to suffer or it."

Wild shouts answered him—

"Withdraw your troops!"

"No. I obey my orders."

"Tilly stands firm," said John to Cornelius.

Verhoef, mounted on a white horse, rode up to the cavalry of the States, an Orange flag in his hand.

"Very well," he shouted fiercely, "if it is orders you want we will get them for you!"

And he and his troop galloped off in the direction of the Stadhuis.

John drew back from the window.

"They have gone to procure an order for Tilly's withdrawal," he said in a low voice.

The eyes of the brothers met across the prison space.

"The magistrates will never give that order."

John put his hand to his breast.

"Oh, pray God they do nothing base, for they were great—my Republic."

Quickly he composed himself again.

"We will not believe it, Cornelius."

"No man could be so weak or so wicked," said his brother, "as to deliver us to certain death."

"No," said John. "No——"

But he added almost instantly.

"I would the Prince was at the Hague, Cornelius."

"The Prince!" answered his brother, "he is too good a politician. . . . He was very careful not to be at the Hague to-day."

"Ah, no, Cornelius . . ."

The Ruard smiled in an angry kind of scorn.

"They have sent for him—well—he will not come."

"I believe he will—let him only get the message in time——"

"Ah—'let him'—that is his skill, to cloak himself with 'ifs' and 'lets' . . ."

"You never liked him," said John de Witt, "but I cannot believe him vile."

Cornelius dragged himself painfully into a sitting posture.

"Hark to that!"

He listened to the manifold and surging noises of the crowd without, held only at bay by Tilly's dragoons.

"Some devil's arts have struck this fury out of them."

"It is Michael Tichelaer," answered John, staring from the window.

"Michael Tichelaer! a boor!—who is behind Michael Tichelaer?"

John was silent.

"I will answer you—William of Nassau—I think his agents are there now below urging the people on."

"Cornelius—I do not credit it—ah! do not let us fill our thoughts with such images."

He moved away from the window, his hand to his brow.

"Not now," he added—"not now."

Cornelius looked at him with a fierce tenderness. He had never from the first alarm thought to save himself, but he had not anticipated the horror of involving his brother in his fate.

"I was mad to send for you," he said bitterly.

John de Witt did not speak.

He sat drooping in one of the rush-bottomed chairs, his black velvet mantle hanging from his shoulders, his long hair and the silk ties of his cravat falling over his breast; the clear-cut, fine lines of his face were set off by the heavy lace round his throat; his thick brows were slightly contracted; the firm, full lips set resolutely under the slight moustache.

He gazed absently at the rough prison floor and mean walls to which his destiny had narrowed: endeavour, achievement, dignities, honour, labour, the council, the Cabinet, high hopes, noble toil, all come to this paltry square of boards and plaster where he sat forsaken.

His life-work had been over before he entered the humble door, but he had cherished modest desires: some little leisure to teach his son and love his daughters, some peaceful time in which to draw nearer the God he had always served . . . in the heart his countrymen had broken.

He thought of all the things he had wished to do and had left undone—of his home and the farewells that morning that were never to be spoken again.

His heart seemed to contract, then swell, stifling him.

He turned in his chair with a quick movement of agony and saw his brother's dark, resolute eyes gazing at him.

"Cornelius!"

"I curse myself that I brought you here," said the Ruard.

"Even if I had foreseen this I would have come," answered John. "We are at least together," he smiled. "Since we have shared everything for so long it is good that we share this now."

He went swiftly to the door and opened it on the two burgher officers without.

"Mynheeren," he said courteously, "how go events without?"

The men were both troubled and frightened; one had been down to speak to Tichelaer, who had just returned from a parley with the magistrates, who were utterly in the power of the mob.

Tichelaer and Verhoef had both been deaf to the pleadings of the councillors, and had declared their intention of dragging the brothers from the prison and hanging them on the gibbet, refusing even to wait until the Prince reached the Hague.

"His Mighty Noble Highness is too tender-hearted," Tichelaer had declared; "the work must be done in his absence."

Under the excuse that a body of rebellious peasants were marching on the Hague, the burgher companies had ordered Tilly to withdraw and defend the entry to the town. But on his firm refusal to obey any but his masters, the States, Tichelaer, seeing all attempts to gain the prison useless while he kept guard, had gone before the magistrates a second time to extort the written command for his withdrawal.

"But, Mynheer," said the burgher officer, "they will not give it."

John de Witt gave him a sweet look never to be forgotten.

"You are a good fellow," he said, "and have done your best for us . . . it must be as God sees fit."

He turned into the room again.

Cornelius was reading in the little Horace, on the fly-leaf of which he had that morning written his name and the date in commemoration of his sentence.

He was about to speak, but such a furious shouting rose from the Plaats that he was silent.

John went to the window.

He saw Tichelaer, the foam whitening his horse, ride up to Tilly, a paper in his hand.

"He has the order!" exclaimed John de Witt; and even as he spoke the command was given, the dragoons wheeled round and galloped away across the Plaats, the triumphant crowd making way for them . . . howling, yelling.

"Have they gone?" asked Cornelius grimly.

John's beautiful hand clutched the cold bars.

"Oh, this is a bitter way to die!" he murmured.

He turned his head that he might not see the struggling press below; the ferocious, distorted faces of men and women hastening on with shining arms and glittering knives burning in the sunshine.

"Why were not the bullets merciful at Southwold bay?" exclaimed Cornelius. "I would rather have death any way but this—the life beaten out of me by those curs!"

He made a passionate gesture with his bandaged hand towards the window.

"I would not have believed they would have done it . . . no . . . have given that order . . . not that . . ." said John faintly.

He stood with his hand on his breast, his eyes wide.

The refined and beautiful body shrank from the thought of torture and humiliation as the noble soul blanched from degradation and shame.

He was afraid of the manner of his death; drew back from it with loathing as he would from a sight of horror.

A volley of musketry sounded, and violent blows; the crowd were attacking the prison door.

John put his hand over his eyes; an awful, sick giddiness overcame him.

Cornelius struggled to his feet and caught his blue mantle round him.

"Is there no way out?" muttered John. He moved desper-

ately from one side of the prison to the other, and beat his hand against the cruel iron bars—trapped—forsaken.

With a hideous, harsh crash of iron on iron the door below gave way ; yells and the crash of weapons came up the narrow stairway, and one of the burgher officers rushed in, crying—

“They are in ! They are forcing Van Bossi to give them the keys.”

“There is no need,” said Cornelius calmly, “the door is open.”

He sat on the edge of his bed, wrapped in his blue mantle, a close cap on his head, from under which his brown curls escaped on to his shoulders ; his colourless face, marred with suffering, was composed and resolute.

“I will make them listen to reason !” answered the soldier, and went out into the corridor.

“This is the end,” said Cornelius.

John smiled in sudden exaltation.

He took up his brother’s Bible and seated himself in the rush-bottomed chair beside the bed, the pages fluttered a moment under his white fingers, then he began to read—

“‘Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect—yet not the wisdom of this world nor of the princes of this world, that come to naught——’”

Cornelius bowed his head.

“‘But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery *even the hidden wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory—which none of the princes of this world knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory——’”

Outside their sole defenders were endeavouring to restrain the onslaught of Tichelaer ; the corridor was choked with swords and muskets.

John de Witt continued, in an uplifted voice—

“‘But as it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.’”

The Groote Kerk struck four.

With angry curses at the delay, Tichelaer and his men broke across the threshold.

John de Witt laid down the Bible, put on his hat and turned to face the door.

"What do you want?" he asked, and gazed at them with narrowed eyes.

They had all been drinking heavily; they were all roused to the height and very extreme of brutish passions, but they fell back smitten where they stood, their violence turned upon themselves at the sight of John de Witt.

Like a creature of another world, trapped and helpless, yet abashing its hunters, who feared to be laid low by some disguised and hidden god, he stood looking at them, composed, unarmed.

"What do you want?" he repeated.

Tichelaer lurched forward; but made no attempt to touch him.

"We want this villain," he said, and turned to Cornelius.

More men were forcing into the room, fiercely accusing of bribery the two who strove to prevent them.

Encouraged by sheer numbers, Tichelaer strode to the bed.

"Come, get up," he said roughly to the Ruard. "Pray to God and prepare yourself, for you must die."

"What harm have I done you?" asked Cornelius calmly.

Verhoef the goldsmith answered—

"You have attempted the life of his very Noble Mightiness the Prince, and you are an ugly traitor—make haste and get up."

John stepped towards him.

"You," he said to Tichelaer, "*know* my brother is innocent."

Under the terrible fire of his eyes the false accuser shrank back. Another ruffian, a miller, aimed the butt end of his musket at the head of Cornelius.

John, catching the fellow's arm, turned it aside, it hit and shattered the bed-post; on this a notary named Van Saenen struck the back of his head with a pike.

De Witt turned and looked at him proudly and calmly.

Again they hesitated ; not one of them offered to seize him.

He removed his hat, pulled out his handkerchief and bound it round his head, for the blood was dripping down his curls.

"Is it your intention to kill me also?" he asked.

A murmur came from those at the back.

"Yes, traitor, thief, and rascal, you shall have the same fate as your cursed brother!"

"Dress yourself!" shouted Verhoef, and flung the Ruard's clothes on the bed.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked them. "Where do you want me to go?"

He was as calm and resigned as he had been before the torture. He tried to draw on his violet stocking over his maimed foot, but was so threatened with a dagger at his throat that he had to stumble to the floor undressed as he was.

"What do you want with me?" he repeated haughtily.

"You will soon find out!" they shouted back ; and Tichelaer turned on John, who was advancing towards his brother.

"Do you wish my life?" asked de Witt. "Very well, then take it."

But Verhoef caught Tichelaer back.

"These traitors must die on the gibbet!" he cried. "Spare them till then."

Again the hideousness of his death presented itself overwhelmingly to de Witt ; he drew back against the plaster walls, sick at heart.

"Are you all less than men?" he demanded. "Give me a sword——"

He made a futile effort to snatch one from the crowd ringing him round.

"Traitor!" shouted Tichelaer.

"Do *you* dare use that word to me?" answered John de Witt. "Had all done their duty as I did not a town had been lost—— Give me a sword," he added. "Some weapon——"

Tichelaer gathered courage to strike him with the end of his musket.

"God has overtaken you!" he yelled.

John de Witt held up his mantle to protect himself.

"You dare to take the name of God?" he answered. "You have long since denied Him by your villanies."

As he spoke he saw Cornelius raise clasped hands to heaven as he was thrust violently on to his knees.

"Let me get to my brother!—I could yet make this little room glorious——"

"Do not finish them here!" cried Verhoef. "Take the ruffians to the gibbet!"

They worked themselves up again into the fury the actual presence of the de Witts had cowed. Tichelaer and his followers, among them a lusty butcher armed with an axe, pushed between the brothers, separating them by the width of the room.

Some one struck John de Witt on the face, cursing him.

The insult brought the blood to his cheek.

"Fellow, I will not take that!" he said, and cast the man down.

It was the signal; here was the incentive. A dozen clutching hands laid hold on John de Witt's mantle.

"Ah, do you lay hands on me!" he cried, and lifted high his mantle to screen his face.

Verhoef gave him a push that made him stagger and fall.

"Behold the downfall of the Perpetual Edict!" shrieked Tichelaer.

John de Witt got to his feet again; there was a look of startled horror on his face. The handkerchief was shaken from his head and the blood ran down his collar.

They were quick to see his anguish, and laughed, seizing him by the arms and dragging him towards the door.

But quickly composure came again; he spoke with a coolness that confounded them.

"I have never betrayed you—I swear to God I have always done my duty——"

Tichelaer threatened him with his sword, but did not dare touch him because of the great brilliance of his eyes.

"Let me get to my brother——"

"Why do not you strike?" shouted Verhoef.

"Our friends below must have a hand in this—they are getting impatient," the others shouted back; and John de Witt, at the point of a dozen swords, was forced down the close stairs.

Having lost everything else, he was still resolute to save his honour.

"I die by calumny—I am not what you think——" came his clear cry.

They pushed him forward. He drew back as he reached the first landing, for he could see the armed and hideous crowd below filling the open door of the prison, waiting for him; he could see the upturned faces.

He set his lips, and his nostrils distended, as he heard the shrieks of furious triumph which rose as they saw him—at last.

"Make haste!" they cried to Tichelaer. "Make haste!"

Verhoef dragged him forward; at that moment Cornelius, bruised and maimed, scarcely able to stand, was struck with a plank and flung down the first flight of stairs.

John turned and held out his arms across the swords and muskets.

For a second their hands were just able to touch; they looked into each other's eyes, and even smiled, as they were torn asunder and delivered to the greedy, waiting crowd . . .

"Farewell, Cornelius!"

"Brother—farewell!"

CHAPTER XIII

WILLIAM OF ORANGE

A COACH was drawn by a pair of fresh brown horses, at a gallop through the quiet village of Ryswyck, an hour short of the Hague.

The sun was near its setting, and the peasants leaving their work turned to mark with surprise the haste of the coach as it swung on its leathers along the smooth white road.

It had just reached the little church with the lead cupola when a horseman spurred up from the opposite direction.

"Halt!" he cried.

He spoke with such an air of authority that the coachman drew rein, swerved his vehicle, and stopped.

"Do you ride to the Hague?" asked the horseman, panting.

"Ay, to the Hague;" the man stared at his questioner.

"Then turn back! turn back! . . . the Hague is no place for honest men . . . turn back!"

His voice and face were wild, his appearance dishevelled.

"The MM. de Witt have been murdered!" he said hoarsely, "two hours ago—my God! my God! They were to hang them on the gibbet—they dragged them out of the prison for that end—but they had not got them through the gate before they tore them to bits. . . . There was nought left to tell John from Cornelius save the difference in their height . . ."

"Oh, my lady!" cried the coachman, and sat stunned.

The villagers had gathered round and were listening in a

bewildered terror. The horseman dismounted, so possessed by what he had seen that he must babble of it.

"I say they cut their hearts out. . . . They are hanging head downwards on the gibbet—all red . . . the MM. de Witt! . . . See, I bought this . . . for two sous. . . . They cut off his fingers for he used them to sign the Perpetual Edict."

He unfolded his cloak from something he carried against his breast and held it out.

"Oh, my lady!" moaned the coachman and let the reins fall.

The coach door was opened, a lady in a garnet-coloured mantle stepped out and came towards the increasing and horrified group.

"What have you got there?" she asked in a strange voice. "Show it to me."

The horseman turned to her frantically.

"I saw it done—while he lived, too—look!"

He held out a beautiful human hand, torn and bloody, half enwrapped in a length of fine lace.

The lady drew closer.

"I know that hand very well," she said. "Yesterday it was on the body of my husband."

A shriek ran round the group. The wretched stranger, finding himself face to face with the wife of Cornelius, fell on his knees in the road and could not speak.

Maria de Witt was quite collected. In that instant when she heard, through the coach window, that she was too late—when she heard what had happened at the Hague—heart and brain had broken.

"I have been very patient," she said, "for it was God's will—but I must hasten now, for I wish to accompany him into exile.—I heard at Dordt this morning, Mynheer, that he was exiled."

She turned towards the coach.

"Why do you not drive on?" she asked, and fell against the dusty wheel.

There was no one with her save the two men-servants ; they dismounted and led her to the roadside, themselves incapable with grief.

"Where is his hand?" she asked. "My lord gave me his hand——"

She turned sweet, expressionless eyes on the horseman, who laid the bloodstained relic reverently in her lap ; she sat on a heap of stones beneath a tall poplar tree.

"She must not go to the Hague!" he cried. "Find her shelter here."

"Mynheer John's children?" gasped the coachman.

"His clerk took them to safety. It is like a fair at the Hague—the magistrates all dumb with dread . . . and on the Plaats—— Oh ! I am sick with what I saw."

It had grown dusk ; the villagers crept softly round the figure of Maria de Witt as she sat meekly clasping the hand to her breast.

"He is hurt, hurt !" she said in accents of agony,—“the rack, the pulley and the boot, but I have balsam in the carriage—Ladies, there will be an engagement at sea to-day, and my husband will save us all.”

They appealed to the pastor to take her in ; but he was too cowardly to give her shelter, so they led her, unresisting, to the humble inn.

One servant stayed with her, the other embarked for Rotterdam to bring to her her sister-in-law, Maria Hoeuft.

She would not leave the parlour which she had first entered, nor take food, nor leave the fair right hand that she carried against her breast as tenderly as if it were her child.

The village surgeon would not visit her ; the peasants stood aloof, fearful of befriending one so unfortunate.

For awhile they thought that she did not know the extent of her misery, but presently she called for a quill and ink-horn, and took from her pocket Cornelius' little brass-bound diary.

Over a clean page she had written the date, meaning to add beneath it her husband's release. Very clearly and steadily she

made now this entry, it ended the record of the Ruard's domestic life, kept very carefully by him until his imprisonment—

"This day, August, my beloved husband was horribly murdered at the Hague by the burgher faction, with our brother, John de Witt.

"He was in his fiftieth year, having been forty-nine years old on June 19, 1672. He had been taken on the last day of July to the Court of Justice, and from thence, on August 6, to prison, there to be cruelly tortured on the sole accusation of an infamous person, Michael Tichelaer, barber of Piershill.

"May God preserve all men from such misfortunes as those by which the twentieth of this month has been so sorrowfully signalised."

When she had finished she looked up with a wild air.

"Is it right?" she asked, "is it right?—we must submit to God!—all my happiness!"

Then she rose.

"Cornelius—you must snuff the candles——"

She sank on to the chair, smiling and unconscious.

They lifted her on to the settle and put out the light.

There was much to do in the little inn, and she was the widow of Cornelius de Witt, so they left her alone . . .

When she recovered she sat up in the dark, then rose to her feet unsteadily.

Enough torchlight glimmered through the window for her to see the door; she pulled it open and stood listening.

In the opposite room, across the narrow corridor, men were talking together; their door stood ajar, and a thick bar of yellow fell across the darkness.

"If he had had the first message it had been prevented, Bentinck."

"I never saw him so moved as when he heard the news."

"This delay frets him—he cursed the groom for that loose shoe——"

"Yet now it is too late."

The speakers swung out into the corridor; soldiers both, richly dressed.

They took no notice of Maria, and her useless brain attached no meaning to their presence or their words.

They strode out into the courtyard. The whole inn was full of noise and confusion, sudden lights and runnings to and fro.

Maria stood forgotten, not heeding or caring anything. Then she heard some one say, suddenly—

"The Prince is impatient to be gone——"

The Prince!

Her scattered wits caught at the word. She turned back into the chamber, now bright from end to end with the light of the torches in the courtyard outside; she took up the stiff white hand wrapped in the stained lace.

"The Prince," she said.

For a moment her clouded brain cleared; she stepped into the corridor, looking about her, drawn erect.

The door of the parlour opposite was open wide now, and she could see, by the light of a tallow candle set on the table, a young man sitting gloomily, his cheek propped on his palm and his face hidden by his chestnut hair.

Maria de Witt stepped into the small, sombre chamber.

"You are the Prince," she said. "I saw you once in a *traineau* on the ice—you wore a mask, but I know you."

William of Orange looked up, and stared across the smoky yellow light.

Seeing a lady splendidly dressed, her black hair on her shoulders, a face horrified, and fierce and desperate eyes keenly regarding him, he gave a little exclamation as he rose.

"You are the Prince," she repeated.

His violet cloak fell apart over his cuirass and his lace cravat; he made no answer as he moved slightly away.

"I wonder what I should say to you," said Maria de Witt.

She put the thing she held at her breast down on the table between them.

"That is the hand of your enemy—are you proud of what you have done?"

He turned his head away with a sick look.

"Madame, who are you?"

"I am his wife."

She looked fixedly at the Prince.

"*You* are his murderer."

He put his fingers to his lips and stared at the dead hand.

"Is this the hand of John de Witt?—I clasped it yesterday——"

"It is my husband's hand."

His great eyes travelled to her face.

"You are unsettled in your mind, lady. Have you no better shelter than this?"

She struck her breast vehemently—

"I must curse you! Are you content—at last? You hated them so."

"This is unendurable!—I—Madame," he pushed his hair back from his low brow,—“I am guiltless of this horror.”

"No!" she said softly, and her eyes flickered with an insane light. "*They* hang on a gibbet on the Plaats—what shall I wish you? You who let it be?"

She pulled at her long lace collar, staring at the Prince.

The two soldiers re-entered the dim room, and gazed at the half-seen figures in the tawny, fluttering light.

"Bentinck," said William, "I shall be greatly shamed for this."

Maria de Witt did not lower her dark eyes from his face.

"If you should ever love and then bear what I now bear," she whispered,—“would that be punishment?"

The three men stood motionless.

"If you should die childless with your work incomplete—would you be punished then?"

William winced, and caught at M. Bentinck's sleeve.

"They would have lived for me, Madame."

Her proud poise relaxed; she fell into the chair the Prince had risen from.

"God, God, God!" she said dully. "We must submit to Him—why did He not save Cornelius?"

M. Zuylestein peered over the table.

"The hand of the Grand Pensionary," he shuddered.

Maria de Witt slipped to her knees.

"They tortured him!" she cried, clasping her hands, "and my balm is all spent——"

William of Orange gave her a wild glance.

"There are many hearts like to break before this task of mine is done," he said, "perhaps my own amongst them. Come away—my work will not wait—I think those laggard knaves have shod my horse—come away——"

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